

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 2, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Head Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



Iowa-24, Utah State-14

KIRK FERENTZ: (Joined in Progress) We had a lot of good momentum going in all three phases and then got stopped on the fourth down and seemed to be a dropoff at that point.

Some things that we're going to have to get cleaned up, certainly. So that's going to be the challenge this week. I saw cliché-wise about week one to week two, and that is true. I think overall it's true, most clichés are, if you make it be true.

So that will be a challenge, but some plays we'll see on tape that were close where we couldn't quite execute them offensively, defensively.

Special teams survived a punt block. I've never seen one quite like that. Certainly that was a good thing, so that's going to be the next thing moving forward.

Work will begin today, but right now we're going to enjoy the fact that we came out of it 1-0, and I think fairly healthy. The other big thing is everybody has to get rested and recover a little bit so we can get back to work next week.

Again, all-in-all happy about the guys' effort. Happy to get the win.

Just do want to say, too, that our fans were fantastic. It was great to come out in Kinnick. The place was sold out, and it was lively and a great environment down there. We appreciate their enthusiasm.

#### **Q. What did you think of Cade's performance, and was he iffy at any point the last couple of days?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not so much the last couple of days. Earlier in the week, I think so. What we'll see is it's probably going to be week-to-week, day-to-day, but I imagine it's something we're going to have to manage as we go along. Hopefully it get better as we go.

It was pretty clear he was intent on playing. He practiced well. We'll just take it day-by-day. Hopefully tomorrow it's not too sore, and he can just get back to work on Monday.

#### **Q. Did he kind of battle you to stay in there in the fourth quarter a little bit? Deacon was warming up a little bit.**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know. I think he may have said something to somebody else, but he didn't to me.

#### **Q. Moving forward with Cade, where is the balance between healing that injury that he's got and getting the proper reps to get him ready for the next opponent?**

KIRK FERENTZ: There's really no way to predict this stuff. I was saying during the week back in '15 CJ progressively got worse, and he really couldn't practice that last week before our bye week when we were at Northwestern. Somehow, somehow he played a good game there.

Then the next week we gave him a chance to recover. He came back and played. So the one thing I know about Cade, I haven't been around him that long, but he is an extremely mentally tough guy and extremely competitive.

So if he can't go, he can't go, and if he can't be effective, that was the biggest thing for us as coaches. We have to make that decision, and the medical staff dictates whether he can have that opportunity or not.

#### **Q. It was 24-6, and he didn't come back in the game. Was that your call, and if so why did you make that call?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not that we had the game in hand, but we felt good about things a little bit. We wanted to get him out and give him a chance to regroup a little bit and hopefully not set himself back.

Good opportunity for Deacon too. It's the first time I think he has played in college. There's no automatics on all this stuff, so it was good to see him get in there and get in the game as well.

#### **Q. You scored touchdowns on the first two drives of the game. Then kind of had a little bit of a lull before**

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**the fourth quarter. What did you see go well the first two drives, and what did you maybe see you needed to work on in kind of that middle part of the game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think the most disappointing thing was we had some leakage on that fourth and one, so the back didn't really have a chance to hit it the way you need to. We'll have to take a look at that and see what happened. I can't tell you exactly what happened on that play.

To me equally as disappointing, they took it and drove it and got a field goal. We held them out of the end zone, but that's part of what we have to learn.

You have to have responses. You're not always going to make it if you go for it on fourth, so come back, let's get the ball back immediately and go back to work.

So that's the team football component. We did a good job of that earlier getting the stop, taking the ball, driving it, those types of things. Part of that's just an emotional thing. We have some young guys, first time they've played, so they're going to learn how all of that fits together.

Then specifically we had some plays that seemed like we missed on a couple of plays that were potentially going to be pretty good for us. If you can hit those, that's how you create momentum. That's how you get things flowing a little bit.

When you don't, it's kind of a here we go, we're punting the ball. We also blew a protection. I'll throw that one in there. It was the only sack we gave up, but it was a missed assignment where they came right up our guard center gap, which is a cardinal sin in pass protection. I think it was on a third down, too.

So that's a correctible error. It was by somebody who probably was capable of doing a little bit better on that. Little things like that are the things that keep you from sustaining drives.

**Q. 12 personnel, 13 personnel, even 14 personnel. What kind of does this bring where you are able to have four tight ends on the field, and is that something that you see using down the road?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Outside of Ostrenga, we have some experience, which is good, and certainly Luke and Erick have shown that they're pretty good college football players. Addison is a guy who we're real high on. He did some good things last year. He has just handed things well.

Steve is a guy I mentioned a while ago that a year ago was

okay. Tough transition from a smaller school, but boy, he has really done a good job and started getting everybody's confidence last spring the way he was practicing. Kind of continued that through August. So I think we have some depth there.

I'm encouraged by our receiver room, too. I think you got a little glimpse of what we've seen in practice. We feel good about Nico and Diante, but also have Kaleb and Seth in there. Good to see those guys get out there.

Again, it's just part of putting this whole puzzle together and getting guys some experience.

**Q. You mentioned the pass protection error. I think just a little over 100 yards rushing as well. Just thoughts on the offensive line's performance.**

KIRK FERENTZ: It seemed like from where I was standing they were blocking pretty good, especially in the pass protection. That was not their pickup on that one, and it is what it is.

But the run game, it wasn't clean. We need to get cleaner on that. It was a tough preparation. I'm not making excuses. It was a little bit of a tough preparation.

The coordinator has been at a couple of other schools -- watching last year's Utah State's film was in a nutshell not going to be beneficial to us. It was one of those ones where you are trying to piece things together. They did some things today maybe we didn't expect, but I think our guys adjusted to it.

But the run game stuff, and sometimes it's just simple cleanup, too. One guy missing a block, and then all of a sudden we're using two guys on one. That's not a good thing. If you want to have a smooth run game, you can't do it.

**Q. Is Xavier Nwankpa okay?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He was factored a little bit in that fourth quarter with a couple of guys. Some cramping. We lost one guy at halftime to the heat. Nothing long-term, but it's where our guys have to be smart here the next 48 hours.

I remember Bob Kratch having real heat issues on Monday two days after we played K-State, whatever year it would have been -- '88, '87. I should know that, but he felt the effects because he didn't get back to where he should have and ended up going down in practice that Monday.

You have to really take care of yourself. I think our guys understand that. Heat was a factor today.



**Q. The second and third quarter, how important was it for your first team offense to go out there in the fourth quarter and kind of get that touchdown just for momentum going into the season?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's always important. You want to take the ball every time you have it and do what you want with it, whether it's try to burn clock or obviously get a score, and that's usually the goal is to go get points.

It was good. That's important. We got a spark play. Luke certainly made a great play on that thing. That's football. We'll just keep working on it and keep chipping away.

**Q. How did you feel that Cade McNamara performed on the field?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought well. You have to remember with him, too, he hasn't played in a year. It's been a year for him.

So those are things you just kind of keep in consideration. He did a good job, he seemed comfortable with things. You can tell he is a guy who has played because the conversations going back and forth are pretty good.

**Q. Is there anything you're able to say on Jermari Harris's status?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He is going to be out next week, and then we're looking forward to having him return.

**Q. After last year's offensive struggles, was it refreshing to have an opening drive passing touchdown?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's refreshing any time. Any time you score, any time you move the ball it's a good thing.

**Q. It was the first time since 1991 that Iowa has had a passing touchdown on their opening drive of the game. Did you have an idea that you wanted --**

KIRK FERENTZ: That's good trivia.

**Q. Credit somebody else. I just saw that on Twitter.**

KIRK FERENTZ: You're cheating. That's good.

**Q. Did you have an idea that you wanted to at least let Cade maybe show off for the fans a little bit to start the game off?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we are not that -- we are just trying

to score. I'm glad it worked that way, but yeah, I didn't know that.

**Q. It went to a transfer, one of your new transfer portal guys that came in, Seth Anderson.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Seth has been a great young guy since he has been here. He is really likable and a tremendous young guy. He is a young guy -- emphasis on that. Same with Kaleb (Brown).

So, yeah, we went for him in recruiting. Unfortunately, he couldn't practice in the spring because he had a soft tissue injury. You're hoping, you're wishing, and that's recruiting in general. You hope you identify the right things, and then you really don't know until they start getting into things. Transitioning into the program is a big part of it, too. He did that without any issues.

To see him play football and we finally got to see him in August, actually running routes and doing things. I think he has tremendous upside. I feel the same way about Kaleb. They are young guys that have talent and great attitudes and good ability.

**Q. What did you think about Deshaun Lee coming in playing against an active team? Only had maybe one missed tackle that was obvious, but the rest of it -- what did you think of him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It was impressive, his tackling and being where he should be to contain some of those things.

Really maybe as good a story as there was today because you have a guy like Cade who has played. Deshaun hasn't really. So for him to step in there and do that, I thought he did a great job.

We've had good competition throughout August with those guys. For him to step -- this has to be good for his confidence, and now hopefully he doesn't get too overconfident because I'm thinking about a play earlier it would have been, night game. Might have been the game that went forever. They threw one over our head on the left corner there. Hopefully we don't get overconfident.

**Q. You guys have won the toss and it seems like a lot of times defer. Was the choice to receive, was that something that was -- was kind of I guess a statement or you really wanted --**

KIRK FERENTZ: We've probably -- I'll speak in generalizations. We probably receive it more than most teams. I can think of one that might do a little bit. At least they do against us. I think it's a mind game.

We just tend to do that, but we had a discussion on it yesterday. Smart people would probably tell you to defer as the thing you should do. I think the book probably says that, but --

**Q. Is Leshon okay?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He has heat issues, too, so we expect him to be fine.

**Q. Kaden Wetjen had several touches the entirety of the game. Is he a guy who impressed in camp?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I just got done saying on the radio he is a great guy. He came here last January. He's really fast and is a great young guy, but last spring, last summer he just couldn't get traction football-wise.

So last spring we started to see him come alive, and he had a really good August. I think he is going to be a guy that's going to be able to play a role for us. It's a credit to him. He just stayed focused, and he has really worked hard.

**Q. 16 tackles today. What did you see from him out there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: For Jay?

**Q. Yeah.**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's what you would expect. Not 16 maybe, but he is a guy that even though, quote, unquote, wasn't a starter last year, we've always considered Jay to be a starter. He is a strong leader. Just a tremendous young guy. Totally committed.

So, yeah, we're counting on him. And the same thing with Nick. For us to be good on defense, our linebackers, our safeties have to be good tacklers and just really happy about Jay's play. Also his leadership is invaluable.

**Q. What did Deshaun do during the fall to earn that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just competition. We evaluate guys every day. TJ Hall is in that mix, so you have a couple of guys fighting it out a little bit.

It's just the consistency, and we felt like he was the most ready to be the starter today. Count him again for next week.

**Q. When you look at the offensive line and just the pass blocking seemed to be improved, run blocking**

**seems to be a work in progress. What kind of steps do you think you could take between now and Tuesday, Wednesday to kind of rectify and move forward?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It seemed I thought overall for their part the pass protection seemed pretty good today. Guys probably -- I don't want to -- the right word is not concerned, but curious to see how Gennings would do. It's the first time he has really played at right tackle.

Whether a guy moves and learns a new position, it's easy to say, okay, here's how you do it, and it's easy for the guy to go out and do it, but then when the live competition starts, sometimes technique goes out the window, and you just kind of try to --

I think of the John Wooden thing about "be quick, but don't hurry." I thought he really looked like he was playing with a good mindset. Really playing to his strengths. I'll be curious to see that film.

That's easy for me to say. It's not always easy to do. I'm encouraged about that.

Most of the running game, from what I could tell, was more of a matter of cutting a guy loose or not getting the right fits we need.

It's never easy, but I think it might get a little easier as we start to have film that's a little bit more -- we'll probably watch their film 49 times this week, and they'll probably watch ours 49 times. So it will be overkill this week. Last week we were all trying to throw darts.

**Q. Speaking of the next game, how much did last year's loss to Iowa State stick in this program's heart?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Every time we play in this series, and it's a great series for the state, we expect them to be tough, whether we're home or there, here or there.

It's going to be a tough game, tough, competitive game. The idea is to win. We came up short, so we moved on right afterwards.

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# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Strategic Communications

## ***Iowa 24, Utah State 14***

### ***Player Quotes***

#### ***Kinnick Stadium | Sept. 2, 2023***

**Jay Higgins**

**Linebacker**

*On the standard for Iowa, defensively:*

“I saw a video from Inky Johnson talking to a college team. He said expectations are external and the standard is internal. Just trying to live up to the standard and keep the defense moving forward.”

*On Utah State’s up-tempo style:*

“I feel like we did a good job handling the tempo. These dudes were getting to the line of scrimmage. Usually teams get to the line of scrimmage to see what [formation] you are in. These guys get up to the line of scrimmage to run a play. I feel like we did a good job handling the tempo. Everybody got aligned. Everybody’s eyes were right. Obviously, there are some things to clean up. Obviously, a pick six would have helped us... It is the first time this group, this defense has played together. I am really proud of the guys.”

*On the linebacker core and linebacker Nick Jackson:*

“Great communication out there. We planned for them to bring tight ends. They didn’t bring any tight ends. When they did bring in tight ends, it was big guys in the core. The ability to change from what we have been practicing all week, and communicate... Pre-snap communication, [Nick Jackson] told me the play was coming, and examples like that are all you can ask for.”

*On defensive back Deshaun Lee:*

“I am really proud of the dude. Young guys. Obviously, they were going to try him with the vertical. They rolled out to the field to throw a long pass back, and stayed on it. That is a play that is not going to show up as a pass breakup or interception, but in the defensive room, when Coach Parker is watching defense, he sees a young defensive back stay disciplined, stay patient. That is all we can ask for.”





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***Player Quotes***

***Kinnick Stadium | Sept. 2, 2023***

**Cade McNamara**

**Quarterback**

*On the opening-drive touchdown pass:*

“I was so fired up. We had the exact look we wanted. To be honest, I was kind of surprised that play was called that early. I was expecting maybe a play action or something, but when Brian [Ferentz] called it and we got the look that we wanted, I was just so fired up to be able to hit that. Seth [Anderson] made a great play on it.”

*On recovering from injury:*

“It is getting better. I knew I wasn’t going to be 100% going into this game. There were a couple awkward positions I was put in, today. To be honest, I think the offensive line really kept me protected today. They did a really good job. A lot of those plays, I was still getting into my second hitch and there was still no one within three yards of me. It is getting better. We will take a look at it tomorrow. I am going to do everything I can to get healthy.”

*On the touchdown pass to tight end Eric All:*

“The amount of joy we both had when that happened. It was kind of a lot different than we practice it. He got caught up on the line. They were bringing a lot of pressures today, so he was able to clear out there for me. All I had to do was just put an easy ball on him.”

*On game-day traditions at Iowa:*

“We have the best fan base. I was so excited. I mean, I was feeling it in pre-game when the student section was already full. We were bouncing around, we were getting fired up, and we were just warming up. It was a really special moment for me to be able to swarm out with my teammates for the first time. The longer I am here, the more I understand how special that is for this program. Today is definitely going to be a day that I will never forget... Same thing [with the Wave]. These are a combination of just unbelievable experiences. I think it is the best tradition in all of college football, so for me to be a small part of that and experience that is an unbelievable moment.”



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***Iowa 24, Utah State 14***

***Player Quotes***

***Kinnick Stadium | Sept. 2, 2023***

**Luke Lachey**

**Tight End**

*On how the game unfolded:*

“I thought we had a great start and think we can continue to build off of that. It’s our goal every week to go out there and get a win.”

*On chemistry with quarterback Cade McNamara:*

“I just want to go out there and be a security guy for the quarterback as a tight end. Every practice, we just try to get on the same page as Cade. It ghas been a great experience and I’m happy he is here.”

*On Utah State’s defense:*

“Defensively, they put a lot of guys in the box. I felt like we needed to be better at finishing our blocks. We did a good job, but we can always work on it and improve on finishing those blocks.”



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***Iowa 24, Utah State 14***

***Player Quotes***

***Kinnick Stadium | Sept. 2, 2023***

Logan Jones

Center

***On chemistry...***

“We have made a big jump. I’ve said it before about our comradery, and today we played a lot more together than the past couple years. The biggest improvement we made was our communication. Last year, I struggled a lot with communication. We’d have Mason [Richman] making calls, and I would have to ask for a call and whatnot. But now, I see something, and then Mason sees something, and we are just all on the same page. Our communication is there and I felt very confident each snap in what I needed to do.”

***On standards of being an offensive lineman at Iowa...***

“There is a standard for what we do here. Not just as an offense, but a standard to go out there and give your all every single play. There were a couple of drives where we were leaving some things out there on the field, and we understood that. We have such great leaders on this team.”

***On improving heading into Week Two...***

“The first game, it is kind of hard to see what we are going to get. They have a new defensive coordinator, so we are trying to watch personnel and figure out what they are doing. At the end of the day, it is about execution and getting things done. We have to go back, watch the film and see the things that we’ve improve on.”