

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 16, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



Iowa - 41, Western Michigan - 10

KIRK FERENTZ: Certainly, I am happy for our football team to get the win. It was hard fought. Our guys worked hard.

Obviously, it was a slow start for us and credit goes to Western Michigan. They came in here with a good plan. They were competing hard, so credit goes to them on that.

I am happy the way our guys responded. It was not the kind of start we had hoped for certainly, but they fought through some things. One thing about football, it's a full 60-minute game, always has been, always will be, sometimes more than that. That's why you play the full 60. You never know what's going to happen.

Hopefully it's a good step for our guys to be forced in a situation of a little bit of adversity and have to fight through that. That's what the season's all about. A lot of different scenarios, things that you experience.

It's a great opportunity for guys to learn, the whole team to learn. Hopefully we learned some good lessons today. Several positions that we got a little spark from. It was good to see some newcomers involved. I'll start with Anterio with the punt block; a guy who's really doing some good things behind the scenes. I think he has a good future here. To see him involved, that was probably not the position you would figure him being opportunistic in. So that was great to see.

Pleased with both the young backs. Kamari jumped in there and did a good job, as did T.J. Washington. We got a couple guys nicked up there, and those guys got called on and did a good job. Then Max White, to get a touchdown at the end, that was a good moment, too.

If you go back and look at the first half, the things we did in the first half or were victim to are the things that, if we're going to win football games and have one football games, we're good at typically, ball security, then check that box.

Then we gave up way too many big plays. It's one thing to give up yards, but when you're uncontested, that's not good. Credit goes to them again. Their execution above those cases was good.

We missed a field goal. It wasn't a chip shot, but Drew's done a great job too. Seemed like nothing was going well. Again, credit to our guys for fighting back, so happy about that.

Unfortunately, I hate to lose Luke (Lachey) to an injury. It's fairly significant, so we'll know more about that in a couple days. They're assessing that. That's the one downside right there.

That aside, happy to be 3-0. Looking forward to moving into Big Ten play. I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. What about the other injuries with Kaleb and maybe Jaziun being banged up?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Kaleb's got an ankle. Got it at the end of the game last week, it didn't respond. We'll take it week-by-week, day-by-day. Jaziun had a little bit of a tweak as well. Obviously, we thought he was going to go today, but tweaked it a little bit during the game. I don't think it's real significant. We'll know more in a couple of days.

**Q. You guys played really well in special teams, especially, as you said, blocked punts. Did you work on that this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Part of the things we do, we always have some kind of block in. It's an opportunity to present itself. Usually when that happens, it's a good scheme, also good execution. Again, for a guy who weighs 290 pounds to be involved in that, he does some good things.

I can tell you also he has the heaviest hands of anybody I've ever been around. So when you slap hands with him, you feel it. Good to see him just have some success. Really good for a new guy like that to come in and do that.

**Q. Coach, you talked about the mistakes in the first half, but last two games, you accepted a penalty for five yards and Cade had that fluke play at the end. What do you credit that to?**

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KIRK FERENTZ: That was a positive certainly. I've never been a believer that you don't necessarily want to be first or second in penalty yardage, but you definitely want to be three, four, five, somewhere in that ballpark. Sometimes if you're not aggressive enough, you end up right at the top of that stack.

But the careless penalties, we had four of those in that first game, three false starts and the defensive offsides. It's hard to win consistently if you're guilty of that.

I'm glad we were able to clean that up a little bit. The guys have done a better job.

**Q. First couple weeks, you guys started fast scoring 24 points total. You couldn't get it going early today. Not to put lipstick on a pig, but how satisfying was it that you guys were able to get it going in the second and third quarter?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm just glad we got it going. We were so slow at the beginning there.

It's the ebb and flow of the season. It's hard to read too much into any one game. We'll probably have more games like this and probably some more like the ones before it. It's the ebb and flow. What counts is your response. How do you maneuver through those things?

Happy to see that today and happy to see the run game get started a little bit. That's a good thing.

**Q. When you look at the running game, that's the highest output you've had in four years. What has helped, I guess, from Game 1 to Game 3, just a two-week period here, to see where it looks like they're hitting their spots and they're getting vertical when they need to?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I've been consistent in saying just execution is such a big part of it. Then you have to have the potential to execute too. The one thing about this year, it's a little bit more realistic to think that we can maybe start playing the way we like to play or have liked to play in the past.

The last two years, we've had our challenges up front. We're not there yet. We're certainly a more mature group overall, physically but also mentally up front.

Then I'm eager to see the film, so, yeah, execution was a little bit better today. It was a tricky preparation, so a lot of credit to our guys. The staff did a good job giving them a good plan, and the backs ran hard. Tight ends have to

block. The receivers have been doing a good job blocking.

If we're going to involve us in an offensive football team, that's a big part of it. I would say it's a more realistic expectation because of the maturity of the guys we have up front right now.

**Q. What sort of effect does the screen pass, the touchdown by Leshon Williams, and taking the leap right before the half, what sort of an effect does that have on your halftime and on the team as a whole?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Hugely positive. That's the second halftime, right? The second intermission. I think we lead the country in two years now for intermissions, time in the locker room unscheduled (laughter).

It was a good spark play. These guys are aggressive with their defensive plan. Good call, great execution. It was good to see Leshon looked like Leshon again. He was cramping up in that first week. He's been practicing well, including this spring.

So good to see him back and have some success. He certainly did a good job getting in the end zone. It was a good lift for us, for sure.

**Q. There was such a big celebration around Max when he got that touchdown. What is it about him that draws so many guys in and make them want to celebrate him so much?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Our guys really like each other as a team. They've been that way since January. We've added guys along the way. But they like each other as a team. Max is a guy who walked on here, had a chance to go other places and receive aid, but came here. He works extremely hard in practice and is playing on special teams doing a good job right now.

He got a little cheer from the crowd when that happened. Same thing with Stilianos. I think he seems to be a little bit of a crowd pleaser. When Deacon hit that pass, all the guys on the sideline, they were pretty enthused about that too.

The guys that don't get to play a lot. It's easy when you're out there playing, but the guys that do all the work, to see them get rewarded is a pretty cool thing.

**Q. At that point in the game, you could basically take knees if you want. You had the second team in there. What made you decide to go ahead and push through?**

KIRK FERENTZ: They were strictly second team guys.



We're going to let them play.

And Deacon's worked hard. We're curious to see how he's going to operate a little bit too. Not that we're going Deacon, but give him a chance to throw a couple in there. Just want to let our guys play. The guys up front too.

Talked about the front line. At least the back line, we can put five guys out there and not expect a disaster. We've had that situation before too. It looked like they knew what they were doing. It's how it's been in practice. It's good to see.

**Q. I think Jackson was pretty productive, most productive he's been these first three games. Can you tell he's starting to feel a little bit more comfortable?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I mentioned on the radio, there are three guys in that regard. The thing about Nick, he played last year, obviously. He played pretty well, but he's in a whole new system.

Cade is kind of in that same boat except he didn't play. He's working through that. He missed time, a lot of time because of that injury, where he really couldn't -- he could go out and maybe throw it, but he really wasn't practicing the way you have to. I think he's probably pressing a little too hard, trying to do too much, be too perfect. That will come with repetition and practice.

The other guy thrown in the same category is Jermari. I think somebody said 18 months since he's played. I don't care who you are. You can be a 10-year veteran in the NFL, when you miss time, significant time, you just don't go back out there and play the way you did when you left.

These are really good opportunities for guys to get the work in and be able to compete. Older guys like that that have had success, they'll accelerate faster than maybe a first or second year guy.

**Q. How did you find Anterio?**

KIRK FERENTZ: How did we find him? I can answer that question. It was actually a year ago March, we have a state clinic in late February/early March, down in Altoona, where everybody -- we all go there. Then we host a little bit of an open house as we start spring ball, the first Friday night before our first Saturday practice.

His high school coach was here and told us about Anterio and kind of gave us the whole story and basically just said, you guys should take a look at him. That's where it all started. So we did our due diligence, and then Kelvin Bell has been on top of him and made the decision we're going

to recruit him.

I'm glad he did. He's a great young guy, really great young guy. He's worked extremely hard. He got here in January. He's got a chance -- he doesn't even know how good he can become. He's still figuring it out, but it's fun to watch him go.

**Q. Top two running backs were dinged up. But do you feel like you can weather the storm at tight end and running back at this point?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if ironic is the right word, but ironically, yeah. At least we have some depth there. We do. The thing about injuries is just, as I've said a million times, it's just guys work so hard to get out there in the field like that. Everything is focused on these 12 games, and the guys put a lot into it.

To have them have opportunities stripped because of injuries, but it's part of the game, too. So we all understand how that works, but, yeah, it's disappointing.

There's not a better guy in our program than Luke Lachey. He's just such a good young guy. Keep our fingers crossed.

**Q. It's fairly obvious to anyone who's talked to Cade how much of a competitor he is. You mentioned how you think he's pressing a little bit over the last couple of weeks, but he's also a guy that's played a bunch of football. How do you balance coaching him through not pressing so much, but also shying away, knowing he can kind of weather the storm and figure it out?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He'll be OK. I'm totally confident in that. He's just -- kind of the point I was making about Jermari -- when you miss practice time, it's hard. He's done it. He's got a resume. When you miss time, it's just not the same. I don't care what position you play, it's just not the same.

The good news is he did more last week than he's done any time since the injury back in camp. To me it's just a matter of time, but also he just -- you know, I quit golf a million years ago and did everybody a favor. But I do know you've got to let the club do the work in golf. That's one thing you've got to learn, and I never quite got that concept down. So if he just relaxes and plays, he'll be fine.

**Q. When you look at the defense, a couple of big, uncharacteristic plays early on. Then you have the weather delay. Then you came in here. Then in the second half, 35 total yards and one first down. What changed? Did anything change?**



KIRK FERENTZ: It felt a lot better, obviously. But when you give up big plays, it's just there's something psychological about it. If you're good enough to create a few of those, it's a big thing, too.

Speaking of Penn State, I remember giving up a big play, and I thought it was not a good -- it was an auspicious beginning back in '09, and then we came through it. It's hard to be a good defensive team if you give up big plays.

We're a victim of it. Good plans on their part. Looked like we'd never seen a quarterback keeper, and that's not very good.

Sometimes guys get a little bit eager, over anxious, maybe they're peaking where they shouldn't be peaking. That's a big part of playing defense, or any position out there, is you've got to have the discipline to take care of your spot first. If you can help out, do it. I think we were guilty of that a couple times today.

Hopefully we'll learn from this a little bit and move on.

**Q. I'm not doing this at 2 a.m. this year thankfully, but how much does it help when you've had last year's experience with the weather delay then going into this year?**

KIRK FERENTZ: You discuss it a little bit in the preseason, and then we had the one in 2019. We've had practice, and unfortunately it's call out for food, and really didn't have much of a warmup. It was just one delay. Kind of like halftime a little bit, maybe a little bit extra.

It does help. I guess in the back of your mind, you know how badly you don't want this to continue to be a delay because we've been through that and boy it's rotten.

**Q. You guys are the only undefeated team in the Big Ten West. Does that mean anything at this point?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We're 0-0 in the West -- but I'd much rather be 3-0 right now -- believe me, I'm not minimizing that. That is the goal to win every time you go out there. I'm just happy to be .500 career-wise now against Western Michigan. I don't know if you guys can pile it on there. That hasn't exactly been a great series for me to be involved.

I'm happy to be where we're at. Tomorrow will be a great opportunity to see some things we can get better at, and we're going to have to. It was like last week, we're walking into a tough environment. We're going into another one and playing a really good football team.

We'll figure that out tomorrow and start working on that. I'm just happy for our guys and happy to be where we are right now.

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# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

## Strategic Communications

*Iowa 41, Western Michigan 10*

### *Player Quotes*

*Kinnick Stadium | Sept. 16, 2023*

**Cade McNamara**

**Quarterback**

*On the offensive point total:*

"It felt good. We battled through some stuff and then were able to put some points on the board in the second half. It definitely felt good to put 40 points up today."

*On running back Kamari Moulton:*

"I mean, that is just exactly how he has been practicing. That is how that dude runs 24/7. For him to go in and to get an opportunity, and then take advantage of that and keep doing what he has been doing in practice. He is such a positive guy that everyone enjoys being around in the locker room, so for him to see some success today, we are definitely happy that that happened."

*On the running game finding getting groove:*

"Even though they were going to bring a lot of stuff in the passing game, with some of that stuff they had to leave a lot of gaps. We were able to kind of control the tempo, and honestly the offensive line did an unreliable job again."

*On the screen-pass touchdown:*

"As soon as I threw it [I knew it would be a touchdown]... It is awesome. My job is just trying to sell it. I am basically an actor on that play. I am trying to make it look like I am going to throw it down field, and then navigate the defensive line to get it to him. Once you have got the specimen Logan Jones out there leading his way, Deshaun felt pretty good running behind him, too."

*On the game next Saturday at Penn State:*

"In way, this was a trap game, because we are all pretty aware that the Big Ten games are the most important. We have got to win those if we want to have any kind of success in the post-season. I have never played in a whiteout; I have only played in a day-whiteout. [Tight end Erick All] and I have both played there. I am sure a lot of other guys on this team have played there. I do not think it is going to be a difficult task on getting ready for this game. I think everyone is going to be extremely motivated for this one."

**Associate Athletics Director, Communications:** Matt Weitzel **Associate Director:** James Allan

**Assistant Directors:** Sam Basler, Leandra Jew, Hannah Ossman, Bailey Turner, Traci Wagner

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**Leshon Williams**

### **Running Back**

*On the team's performance Western Michigan:*

"It feels good to be back out there. We handled business today. Now, it's time to get back to work and move on to next week. We've got a big challenge."

*On the Iowa running back room:*

"We have a lot of backs in the room, as you all can see. We have a real stable, and we are stacked in there with a lot of talent. With the next man up, anything can happen at any moment, so we have to take advantage of the opportunity."

*On the offensive line and run game:*

"They did a great job. Any of you could have run through those holes. They were dialed in today, and we were clicking. We trusted the plays, trusted the process, trusted the play calls. We all put our heads down and continued to work."

*On how his screen-pass touchdown played out:*

"I saw the back sitting right there, and I was going to bluff him, but he ran into the lineman. So, he helped me out. I thought 'alright, cool'. Cade [McNamara] threw me a nice little lob pass. I caught it. I looked down the field and saw Vines doing what he was doing to his man."

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**Kamari Moulton**

**Running Back**

*On making his debut:*

"I have been working so hard for this. It felt good to get out there. I did this for my mom and my grandma, since they've passed, and I know they're looking down and are happy for me, and proud of me. We're always told by our coaches to stay prepared, so when my name was called, I was just excited to get out there and be there for my team. There were a few jitters going out there, but at the end of the day, it's football. Nothing new."

**Mason Richman**

**Offensive Lineman**

*On the run game:*

"The running game just opens things up, offensively. It is great to have that in this game. All seven of the running backs stepped up this game and did a great job, even without Kaleb today, but I think he will be back here soon. So, we have got an army back there now."

*On overcoming a slow start:*

"It was a slower start, but we obviously finished out with the last 30 points of the game. I think it was our attitude. Just looking at these games as another opportunity out there at Kinnick, and our offense took advantage of that."

*On avoiding preseason pitfalls:*

"It was a football game. We knew there were some things we needed to work on our side, but these are the kinds of games if you go out there and sleepwalk, you aren't gonna be able to handle it. I was really proud of our guys and the way we handled it. Defense stepped up, offense stepped up, special teams, everyone really did their job today."

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**Cooper DeJean**

### **Defensive Back**

*On running back Max White's first career touchdown:*

"I am so proud of him. He is my roommate. He is a guy who comes in every single day and works his tail off. He is a guy on scout team and give us a great look week in and week out. I was really proud of him to be able to get in there... If you saw the sideline, I think a lot of guys were going crazy. Especially for a guy like him, who comes in and works his tail off. Everybody knows that he is a leader, and he has barely played any snaps. Everybody respects him in the locker room. I was really happy that the offensive punched that in there at the end."

*On overcoming a flat start:*

"I do not want to say we weren't expecting it. I think we came out a little flat in that first quarter. Those are the things we have got to clean up as we get into Big Ten play here coming up. I really think it was just our energy. I feel like the guys came out with a lot more energy in the second half. Not trying to do too much, just everybody trying to do their job. We may have been forcing some things during the first half, but coming out in the second half guys did their job."

*On the punt-return unit:*

"We thought we would have a good chance to get some returns this week. The unit did a great job, as a whole. The corners, those guys were giving me space to catch the ball and be comfortable. Then, Anterio [Thompson] blocking the punt, which was pretty cool. So, the return game as a whole I thought played really well."

*On defensive lineman Anterio Thompson's blocked punt:*

"He has just come in and tried to learn from day one. Since he got here in the spring, he has been trying to learn and take everything in. He got started on special teams, which is where a lot of guys get their start, and he made a big play for us."

*On the impact of special teams play:*

"It is a three-phase game. Special teams helps out the offense when you can put points on the board in the punt return game with that safety. Then, you get the offense back in short field. It is about the field position battle. We pinned them back deep in the punt game... Good field position is a big part of what we do."

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**Jay Higgins**

**Linebacker**

*On adjustments made in the second half:*

“They came out and competed well. They ran some good concepts against us. I don’t think anything changed, but we just kept doing our job. We got in a rut and were trying to do too much. Then, everyone figured out that maybe Coach Parker knows what he’s doing, so if we just do what we’re supposed to do, we will be alright. We understood that it was us beating ourselves at that point. When problems are extremely solvable, anxiety never got high, guys never pointed fingers, so we were in a good spot mentally.”

*On the Iowa defense allowing 35 yards and one first down in the second half:*

“We literally looked at each other and said, ‘guys, let’s just do our job’. We didn’t make any new calls. We didn’t get new personnel. It was player-driven that something needed to happen. There has to be some level of accountability and trust. I’m out there with 10 guys, and I know that they know what they are doing. They are going to get their job done. The answers are out there. There is no cavalry coming. We knew it was going to be us that had to turn things around.”

**Anterio Thompson**

**Defensive Line**

*On lessons for aspiring student-athletes:*

“If you want to play football, school is a major part. I knew I had to focus, get rid of the bad habits, and lock-in, because I knew I had the talent and ability to get to this level.”

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