

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Saturday, September 30, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Kirk Ferentz

Postgame Press Conference



1-1 in the league, and to get back up on our feet after a tough week on our that's where we're at right now.

We'll celebrate, enjoy this thing tonight and go back to work tomorrow.

Q. After your win, or loss last week, how was practice this week after a tough loss?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'd be lying if I didn't say some of it the lingered a little bit, some of the feel, the sting, if you will.

Monday, I thought we were okay. Tuesday we were lacking some things, and then I thought bounced back Wednesday and were good the rest of the week. That one stung. That's a tough loss and those aren't much fun when you go through them. But it's a credit to our guys, and we are getting some good leadership from guys. And we have some bumps right now, some issues we have to deal with, and it's not going to go away. So we have to deal with that and push through it.

Q. With Cade, is it going to be a multiple-week-at-best type of situation with him?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't want to speculate, but it always is concerning; a guy has to get helped off the field. Considering what he's been through, it's really tough. You feel bad for any player that gets injured but in his case, it's rough.

Q. Anything for Nick DeJong?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just got done talking to him in the locker room. It seemed like it's not as bad as it could have been. So no dislocation, anything like that, which is good news.

Q. What's your confidence level in Deacon Hill?

KIRK FERENTZ: Deacon, unfortunately has gotten more practice, I don't mean that in a negative way, but he's practiced more than a normal No. 2 guy would because of Cade's first issue.

I think that benefitted him a little bit tonight. But it's one thing to practice. It's another thing to step in there when the game is on the line which it was. We had a lot of football to play. I thought he showed good poise out there.

Iowa 26, Michigan State 16

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously, we are very happy about the win and proud of how strong the team came together tonight. It was a tough battle out there, and obviously it's important to win a football game you get a chance at. But the bigger story is the display of resilience we saw from all of our players. And at the end of the day, that can win a lot of football games.

And certainly, I think that was a factor tonight for us. Impressed how Deacon stepped in. Tough circumstance. Disappointing mostly for Cade. To go down early with an injury like that, we really won't know his status until early next week but it's nonetheless very disappointing. I can only imagine how he's feeling.

But I thought Deacon stepped into a tough situation, did a good job of leading our football team and making good decisions, especially in the second half in some critical situations. He did a good job.

Offensively, we didn't have a lot of rhythm. Had a couple good drives in the first half, and then didn't have a lot of rhythm during that part and then it's kind of like a multiple array of things.

Defensively, we want to get off the field a little quicker at times, but I thought they showed resiliency and kept our opponents out of the end zone. That was a big deal.

The bottom line is you can see a lot of things going on. We have a lot of young guys, and some of it's mental. Some of it's physical. But we have a lot to work on, and we'll get back to that tomorrow.

I think the coaching staff is well aware of what we need to get done and the challenges to get it down and move faster as we move forward.

We have plenty of work to do. Not going to let that ruin tonight, that's for sure but really proud of our team's resilience. And bottom line right now we are 4-1, puts at



... when all is said, we're done.®

Played with confidence. And his teammates, you can see they rallied around him, made some good throws and had some other ones we can probably improve on, but I feel like he did a good job for the first time in a really critical time.

Q. How's Cade's spirits?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, you can probably figure that one out yourself. It's not good. No player who gets injured is feeling too happy about things.

Q. If he does have to miss extended time, is that for sure Deacon's job? What's Joe Labas' status, as well?

KIRK FERENTZ: Joe missed a lot of time, too, if you remember, coming into camp. Right now Deacon will clearly be 1, and Joe will be 2, and we'll keep pushing forward.

Q. Does Deacon give you what he need to succeed on offense, and how?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a different style quarterback. He's a big quarterback but he throws the ball well. It's his strength and I thought tonight, we hadn't really seen him in game action, where the game is on the line. And I thought he showed a lot of good things today.

We'll start with that and just keep pushing forward. And his wherewithal, his presence on the bench and on the headsets was really good, encouraging and that's also a good thing.

Q. The last time we saw you lose a starter in a game and have a backup go in like that was Ricky in '09 and James has to come in, and James was cold playing against Iowa State. Did you see the effect of those one represents from Deacon?

KIRK FERENTZ: It definitely helps. It definitely helps. It's tough to be the No. 2 quarterback. But yeah, he's gotten a little bit more work, but also he's new to our program and he has not played since '20, I think. So those are the things that you have in the back of your mind that you have to factor in.

For him to get out there and play successfully tonight and lead us to a victory, it should be good for his confidence. All that being said, there's a lot of work to do.

Q. What did you see on Cooper's punt return?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not sure I would have predicted it based on the way their guy was punting the

ball, first of all. He had a couple rockets that we had not seen.

A couple went over Cooper's head. Gave us bad field position. Then fourth quarter they had one that went out of bounds, plus-50 territory, and then on that one, he got one that we could fuel. As you look out there, he's catching the football and the gunners, our guys did a good job on their gunners. And coverage, there's some space in there.

So if Cooper gets space, something good might happen and he did a great job finishing the play. He's a really good football player.

Q. Aside from what you just said, how would you define him from somebody who hasn't seen --

KIRK FERENTZ: I was talking on the radio about the movie, The Natural... really good players don't look like they are grinding or working that hard out there but they are. Everything he does, just seems to be, it's like it's almost instinctive or natural to him. He has a really good sense in the return game and that's a big part of it.

He's got the courage to field it, and you know, do something with it, and then he has a good knack in knowing how to read things and where to go. The same thing on defense. He finds a place to be at the intersection of the ball quite frequently, and you know, looked like a tough catch, didn't get his foot down but somehow he makes it happen.

Q. You had the fourth-and-one, and kicking the field goal, your thought process with a few minutes left?

KIRK FERENTZ: Emotionally I wanted to go for it. That was my first instinct, and then I think we had stoppage of play, something was going on and I walked down there and it was a little further than I thought. I thought maybe we could just hit it in there quick. It was a little further than I thought, and you know, emotion is one thing but doing the smart thing was the other and I felt like it was best to tie the game and let's keep playing.

Q. It's been interesting watching how opposing offenses have attacked you, more so slicing-and-dicing than attacking downfield. Your secondary has not gotten the turnover rate that you've been used to. How important was it for Jermari and Sebastian and Cooper to really get things rolling in that direction?

KIRK FERENTZ: That stuff, if you're focused on those things, it usually means bad things are going to happen. I'm going to try to encourage the players to do -- just play,

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play the defense and play your spot and if it's meant to be, it will be if you're playing it properly. That's usually how we make big plays defensively.

So when guys start thinking more about getting the pick, that's usually when bad things end up happening. The ones that came tonight are just a product of the way we're doing things and guys making good plays. They still have to make a good play. Yeah, we have not been overly worried about that.

Flipping it on the other side, though, the ball security, that's two weeks in a row now we have done a poor job with that and that's not going to cut it. We've done better in the penalty department but you can't turn the ball over and we had one for a touchdown today.

Q. When you look at your wide receivers or receivers in general, six drops or five in passes thrown by Deacon, was it the change in velocity or anything, or was it just they weren't doing the job?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there might have been a little touch issue on some of the underneath stuff maybe, I don't know. I still think the receivers catch the ball, that's just me. I'm a line coach. If you want the ball, catch the ball.

You know, if we are going to have an offense, we are going to have to do a little better in that partnership and blitz pick ups and we missed one of those tonight which cost us a possession.

And then ball security, you know and our run game, I thought we saw some flashes in the second half, but in the first half there really wasn't much there in the run game.

So you know, we're four-plus, five games into it now. We have got to do a little better job on figuring out what we can do given the guys that we have; it's a moving target with personnel, but figure out what they can do and try to play to their strengths.

If we are going to throw the ball, we have to catch it and that's the way it is no matter who it is. If a guy can make a spark play on top of it like Erick did today, that's good football play. That's getting things going here a little bit.

Just like the picks, usually big plays are a buy product. Guys doing things right and playing hard and maybe breaking a tackle or doing something a little bit extra.

Q. Tonight was the first time we got to see Drew Stevens go out this season, 44-yarder, 53-yarder. What does he bring to the table that gives you a lot of confidence in him?

KIRK FERENTZ: He has been so consistent, basically. I think it was 19-of-21 last year. Missed two on the whole season.

So if you think about where he was a year ago, spring, when he was here and both our placekicking, just looked terrible that spring, maybe as bad as I've seen in a couple decades. The improvement he made just from that time, spring to last fall through the fall, it's impressive, and he's a bigger, more mature kid now and he's done a really nice job.

Q. Frustration, loudly about the offense and specifically about Brian. What would be your message to them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I mean, 3-and-out isn't any fun for anybody. I get that. We're working hard to improve that and that's what we're going to do. That's what we do every year, every season.

Q. About Colby, and then the running backs, could they be back next week?

KIRK FERENTZ: So Connor came in at the end when Nick came out, Connor came in. He came out of last week's game a little bit dinged up, if you will, and practiced, I guess, Friday, yesterday and was kind of like an emergency guy but he came out of the game clear, so we're good to go with him. We'll get him back in there.

And running backs. We'll see. Hopefully, if not next week, the week after. It will be good to get a couple more veteran guys in there.

I thought Kamari sticks it up there and runs hard. It's a good start, but it will be good to have a little more firepower.

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Strategic Communications

Iowa 26, Michigan State 16

Player Quotes

Kinnick Stadium / Sept. 30, 2023

Jay Higgins
Linebacker

On defensive back Cooper DeJean's punt return for a touchdown:

"Any time number three gets the ball, I just look to the end zone. He is a special guy. You don't want to see him in space. Coop in space equals good for the Hawkeyes."

On completing the comeback:

"I just felt like we learned a lot about our team today. This was our first time being down to an opponent and coming back. I felt like we did a great job staying together through the ups and downs of the game. We did a great job, both sides [of the ball], just trying to solve the problem."

On how the crowd affected the game:

"It is our job to make sure we get a third and long at Kinnick. If you can get a team third and long at Kinnick, in the end zone, honestly, it will be really hard for them to convert. The communication the offense has to go with when you can't hear the guy next to you, it is hard to play football."

On bouncing back:

"It was good for us to get back on our feet this week. I felt like we did a great job communicating. Guys were aligned right. I feel like we did a great job trying to eliminate the big plays. They had a lot of gadgets and reverses. I think they reversed it twice. Quinn Schulte made a veteran play. It was just good for us to get out there and compete together as a team..."

"It was good for the team. Good for the locker room. It was good to get back on our feet. It allows us to go into next week with momentum."

On the defense making fourth quarter stands:

"It is what you dream for as a linebacker. Going out there, tie game, knowing you have got to get off the field. Going back out there knowing that they can't score again. If you come to Iowa as a defensive player, that is why you are coming to Iowa, for moments like that. Coach Feretnz puts us in that situation because he trusts us."



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Cooper DeJean
Defensive Back

On playing the full 60 minutes:

"It's a four quarter game. We might not have played our best in the first half, but we came out and kept fighting in that second half. Things really started to go our way."

On his 70-yard punt return for a touchdown:

"Credit to the guys up front doing their job. I don't know if the punt was supposed to be in that location, but when I looked up, there was a lot of green in front of me. The guys did a great job blocking downfield for me. It is my job to read the blocks and try and put it in the end zone. We studied and saw some things based on what their formations were and where we thought the punts were supposed to go. When I caught it where I was, I knew I had a chance. I knew there was a chance for at least a good 15 to 20 yards."

On his interception in the end zone:

"I got a double move on my side and the ball was a little overthrown. The key was tracking it and getting a foot down. That entire drive right there was about the guys clawing and keeping them out of the end zone. We kept fighting."



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Deacon Hill
Quarterback

On stepping up following quarterback Cade McNamara's injury:

"It was pretty surreal. Especially a night game at Kinnick, that's what dreams are made of. It was a lifetime experience that I'll never forget. The best part was being with my team. I couldn't have done it without Erick and the offensive line."

On his performance:

"I thought I played alright. Obviously, there are some things I can work on, and we'll look at that tomorrow. I am just going to focus on being with my team tonight, and we'll go over it all tomorrow."

On overcoming adversity:

"I believe it just speaks to the resilience of this team. It just goes to show the mentality this team has. That's one thing about us: we're a very tough team. We never stop fighting until the last second."

On advice from McNamara on the sidelines:

"He told me to just do your job, play football and keep doing what you're doing. Obviously, it is very nice to have him down there. I have learned a lot from him in the past half of a year that we have been together. I think everyone knows how much he means to this team. He is a tremendous player and a tremendous athlete. I know he's happy for this team, because he is a team player."

On practicing with the starting unit throughout the offseason:

"It helped a lot, being able to build that chemistry with the receivers and the offensive line. These past couple of weeks, I haven't been with the ones every time, but I got out there today. I told them I'm going to lean on you guys, and we are all gonna lean on each other."

On the last time he saw significant playing time:

"In 2021, my senior year. I played three games during COVID, and so definitely being out there tonight meant a lot, especially under these lights and in this stadium."

On defensive back Cooper DeJean's punt return for a touchdown:

"I was standing on the sideline screaming 'run, Coop, run!' Then, he takes off and those two guys missed him, and my eyes got wider, and then he breaks through and I was running down the sideline going nuts. Well, the whole sideline was. It was great."



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Deacon Hill
Quarterback
(Cont.)

On tight end Erick All:

"Erick is one of those guys that is friends with every guy in the locker room. He is very outgoing. He is a great guy. Throwing the ball to him in practice helps, and we've started to build a connection. You know, when you have a 6'5, 200-something-pound tight end who is an athletic freak, you're probably going to throw the ball to him."

On whether he expects to start next week:

"I'm not worried about that. That is going to be the coaches' decision. I am just going to keep working on myself, and what I can control and what I can do to be better for this team. Whatever this team needs me to be is what I'll be."



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Erick All
Tight End

On nabbing three catches in one drive:

"The first play, I got some open space. My focus was on getting out clean on my release off the run. The rest was the throw, and then I had to catch and run. When I caught it I turned and thought, 'wow', it was nothing but green grass. The second play was play action. I was focusing on selling the run. They all bit, and my route was to get out on a corner. I ran straight to the spot, and Deac was ready to throw it. The third play was the touchdown. I couldn't believe that I scored. At first, I thought I was stuck, but then the blockers came. I hit the hole and stayed on my feet. I had to secure the ball and saw the goal line and reached it out over the line."

On quarterback Cade McNamara:

"It was strange because, for as long as I've been in college, Cade has been throwing the ball to me. It was weird at first to look back and see Deac throwing me the ball, but a ball is a ball. It comes right here, you're going to catch it. But I caught Cade in the training room coming back from half time. I just loved on him and told him I have his back, that I was praying for him, told him to keep his head up and to keep fighting."

On chemistry with quarterback Deacon Hill:

"It took us a little time to get the real chemistry going. The quarterbacks have to get used to the speed and the wide receivers. They have to know where the receivers like to catch the ball. We struggled a little bit in camp but things really started clicking and Deacon definitely grew a lot. It really showed out there today."