

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Saturday, October 7, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 20, Purdue 14

KIRK FERENTZ: Happy to get the win. It was hard-fought, obviously Big Ten play, it's going to be that way each and every week and we certainly anticipated that.

We came into today with a lot of respect for Purdue. Tough defense to move the ball against and do some things and then their offense had really been looking good.

So proud of our guys in all phases. Certainly a lot to clean up, a lot to play for and I just told them to enjoy the win. Hopefully we grew a little bit today and we still have plenty of room for improvement, that's obvious. We'll worry about that tomorrow, but right now happy to get the win and get a Big Ten win, that's always a good thing. I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. When you look at the play of their defensive line, coming into today, they had three sacks and today they ended up with six. What did you notice, different or better today?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Just told Gary and Ed that we pulled out the pass rush drill on Wednesday, I've been forgetting to do that or suggesting it. So we did it Wednesday. It seemed to work. I'm joking (Laughter).

No, it was a good effort by all the guys. You know, I think I said before, sometimes it's just a matter of making quarterbacks uncomfortable or getting them off the spot, not just sacks. Sacks are always a good thing but there's a little bit more to it.

That being said, today was clearly the best job we've done. I thought the guys really worked hard and dug hard out there. We have a lot of respect for their quarterback, what a competitor, but he gave us a chance to get there a little bit, too. He didn't always get the ball out.

But more than anything it was just a bunch of guys, and it wasn't just one guy. A lot of good effort out there.

**Q. Seeing Kaleb the last three weeks deal with injury, how have you seen him get through that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you have no choice. It's unfortunately part of the game. Came back a little quicker than maybe I anticipated based on what I heard or was hearing a couple weeks ago but it's been steady.

I was skeptical Monday and Tuesday, quite frankly; for a running back with an ankle injury, you always worry about that. But he looked like he was a hundred percent, and good to get him back. We're not going to get Cade back, but I think we'll get some other guys back at some point.

Obviously Luke is out, too. Anybody we get back, that's a benefit because you know, where we can share the load a little bit that will be good for us.

**Q. Deacon was 6-for-21, what do you attribute the shortcomings there to?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you guys saw him throwing. I'm certainly not an expert on quarterback play. From throwing baseballs, I know this: If you press or try to do too much sometimes, the ball sails and I'm guessing that's probably what it was.

But I thought he kept his composure, and a couple of them, we didn't help him on again. Got to make the makeable plays and we didn't always do a great job of that. But he hung in there. Kept doing a good job, and the last one he threw down our right side, it looked pretty good to me. Was hoping that was going to be a little bit more open.

From where I stand, it looks like the guy did a pretty decent job covering, and an excellent throw and a great job by Erick to finish it.

**Q. Any thought to go to Joe Labas?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Why? During the game?

**Q. Yeah.**

KIRK FERENTZ: No. Deacon is our quarterback right now. And that's no offense to Joe, but that would be silly to make a change.



**Q. How about the play of the offensive line?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I just told Gary, again, the same thing. I thought from standing from the sideline, I'm eager to see the film but I thought we showed a little more maturity, a little more girth and some presence out there.

Overall, from the sidelines, seemed great and I'm anxious to see the tape. Talking about getting Kaleb back, Leshon -- looked more like Leshon today. Took him a while to get started last week, but fourth quarter he looked like a Big Ten back. If we can get the line playing the way we hope they can; and they have been fighting through some stuff, too, that would certainly help us.

We're the kind of team that we're going to need everybody and every little bit is going to help. Yeah, that was encouraging for sure and I'm really proud of those guys.

**Q. How critical was that first drive coming out of the second half, even though it only led to a field goal, but it really seemed like that kind of kick-started the offense a little bit more in the second half?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it did. I'm not a big stat guy, but one thing that jumped out if you looked at Purdue's stats, they have been killing it in the third quarter this year. It's ridiculous. Like it's 49-14. Just told our guys, I know what they are saying over there in their locker room; it's our quarter, and so our guys responded.

To get points is always important; to burn some clock, it's important, for us the way we play and have to play. It was really big. And then the unfortunate part, you can say this and that but potentially we left ten points out there today. Had a chance down in the red zone for a touchdown instead of a field goal, and you like to think we are going to make those other two field goals.

So nothing is automatic, either, in sports, I understand that as well. But those little things are making the game, not that we would have had control, but it would have been a little better for us if we were executing on those things.

**Q. Mason Richman was questionable on the injury report, how close was he to not playing today?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't think he would play. So he got up off the mat and was able to form. That's a credit to him. Didn't look good when I went to bed last night but he moved around last night and did okay.

**Q. Erick's production has skyrocketed in the last two weeks. What have you seen from him and how**

**important is that, having a quarterback with a weapon like that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's not the same as last year, but when Sam went down, Luke spiked a little bit and I think it's probably the same thing. Luke is a big loss. We all know that. He's not coming back, and it's a shame but that's football.

So you know, Erick, to his credit, is getting better every week. He's got a great attitude. That hasn't changed. It was that way when he showed up here.

So I'm really glad he's on our team. It's fun to see guys make plays and feel good about things and it's a real plus for us.

**Q. Tough on the ground -- getting a playmaker back really helps, but how nice was it to see the ball move on the ground?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's huge. If you can run the ball, it gives you such a better chance to be effective, and the last touchdown score was all set up because we got a good run on third down and that is our goal to get it up in there tight.

It set that play up. But if you can't run the ball, you know what I mean, I don't know what we would have called from third and five in that spot. Glad we didn't have to go to that.

But yeah, I mean, if you can rush the passer and then if you can run the football, it makes life a little bit better for sure.

**Q. Speaking of that third and short call, Zach Ortwerth was in the field -- his first ever?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably was.

**Q. What did you think of that play call in that moment?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Looked pretty good to me, so I don't know. I'm glad. Whoever's in, is in. I mean, you run out of guys, you've got to play guys that are there. You know, Zach has not played at all. Pascuzzi jumped in a couple weeks ago and did a nice job. Happy for him.

**Q. I don't believe I saw Kaleb Brown on the field today.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Correct. Personal reasons.

**Q. Defensive line held a little meeting were you aware of that, and what did you think of their performance tonight?**

KIRK FERENTZ: They probably should have more meetings then. (Laughter).

No, I wasn't aware of it and I would encourage them to keep meeting. Was that with or without coaches?

**Q. I think it was player-led. Joe Evans.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Good. I'm all for it. Usually player meetings coincide with losing teams, that's my experience, but this is a contradiction to that. That's awesome. Happy for them. Joking; keep having meetings as far as I'm concerned if he guarantees that production.

**Q. Logan, not sure what's more impressive the comments in the last half-hour in this room about what he means to his teammates or his play on the field.**

KIRK FERENTZ: I've joked about it but Logan is like coaching a 40-year-old guy. We had Aaron Kampman 20 years ago, kind of a similar guy. Married guys, who are extremely mature with their approach and everything they do. He's easy to coach because all he wants to do because all he wants to do is just do well. High-achieving guy in all phases of his life.

But also have to learn to play football. He's dealt with injuries, like a lot of guys on the team, and he's such a better player than he was four years ago. But that's the value of practice and being out there and just the repetition that's important. I think it's important at every position but certainly I know in line play on both sides, it's big.

Credit to him and it's great to see older guys having success with it when they have worked as hard as they have.

**Q. When Deacon is struggling, do you say something to comfort or just try to relax him or just let it play out?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Nothing special. I told him maybe I thought he was pressing a little bit and just to relax. Just keep playing and you're going to be okay, you know, whatever. Don't squeeze the club, you know, whatever it is. To me, try too hard sometimes when you are throwing the ball.

I quit golf 30 years ago for a good reason; I couldn't get that concept down. At some point you have to let things down and don't overdo it.

**Q. Noah Shannon, has anything materialized between Thursday and today? Can he at least practice?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if I'm allowed to say we have encouraging news, but I think we have encouraging news. I'll verify that Tuesday.

But at least, yeah, hopefully. I wish everything had happened sooner in this whole scenario, and if the world were perfect, it would have. But any encouraging news is a good thing, so I'll know more Tuesday but we're optimistic.

**Q. What would he bring, not only on the field; you've seen for five years.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Any time you have veteran guy, and it's ironic. He's a six-year guy, and we have three six-year guys this year and he's been out.

So any time you get a guy back with his experience and the quality of person he is, his leadership, that's always a plus. I have to tell you, the bigger issue for me, not so much in May but now as I watch this whole thing unfold, to me the whole story is just when you have to explain to a player or his parents something that doesn't make sense, right, you compare this to that, and the player and the parent can look at a million examples that are more egregious, and then you look -- that was the hard part, to make something that can't make sense try to make sense.

And then to watch him walk around feeling like he's done something wrong, which I understand, he understands, he broke a rule. But I mean; that worth capital punishment? It's silly. That's been the hardest thing for all of us, and so I guess the answer to your question, a long-winded answer here is, I'll just feel good for him to be back with the team. Because he feels like he's let people down, you know what I mean. These guys have got feelings. They are good, young people, and his mom and dad have feelings, too, and they are involved.

So you know, if he had done something that deserved that punishment, then great. He was fine. We all figured it would be five, six games. He was on board with that and understands it. But anyway, so maybe there's some light out there, and that's what we'll focus on.

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# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Strategic Communications

***Iowa 20, Purdue 14***

***Player Quotes***

***Kinnick Stadium | Oct. 7, 2023***

Joe Evans

Defensive Line

***On the defensive line's performance:***

"I am very proud of everyone in that defensive line room. We got together as a unit for a player-led meeting on Thursday and said just how important it was to play for each other out there. Play for each other and have some fun... Win games, have fun and be proactive. Really proud of those guys and how we all competed today."

***On defensive lineman Logan Lee hauling in 10 tackles:***

"I didn't know he had 10 tackles. That is crazy as a defensive tackle. I see how he works every single day in practice. Honestly, that is crazy for a defensive tackle to have 10 tackles, but not that surprising."

***On defensive lineman Logan Lee as a leader:***

"I have been around him for five years, and he is a tremendous leader. He is a team-first guy in literally anything he does. Like, anything he does, I am not kidding, is team first. He has been one of my all-time favorite teammates, because I know that... He does everything for the team and always puts the team first."

***On whether he anticipated a breakthrough regarding team defensive statistics and pass pressure:***

"Absolutely, based off of how hard those guys work inside the defensive line room. I had a feeling eventually it was going to come. Continue to just keep pushing and pushing and pushing in practice. One of these days it will fall for us."

***On week-over-week improvement of the defense:***

"I think things were clicking better out there today. Honestly, like I say a lot, it starts in practice. With the group of guys that we have, it is let's just keep going. Let's keep on improving. That really all started, and I have said this all the time, with Jack Campbell. Last year we were 3-4, but we were still competing [hard] in practice every day. We had phenomenal looks, knowing we had to keep improving. I see that with this group, too."



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**Aaron Graves**  
**Defensive Line**

***On a breakthrough performance for the defensive line:***

“We held a defensive line unit meeting on Friday before we left for the hotel, and we just talked about how we have been playing super stuck up, tight and stressed about messing up our jobs. We said we’re going to go out there, have fun and play together as a unit. I can speak for everyone on the line and say that we had more fun today than we had in any of the other games.”

***On gameplay against Purdue:***

“I don’t think there was anything particularly different. It was the mindset that we had going into it. It was a lot different than the other games, for sure. We knew their quarterback would run the ball if we got in his face earlier than we did, but I think we were relentless today as a group. Our pursuit of the quarterback was very good today, and that played into our success.”

***On the leadership from the defensive line:***

“To have those two (Joe Evans and Logan Lee), I would include Noah Shannon in that mix too, they’re our leaders. They have been around for a long time and they have seen a lot of football. They know what it takes to be a winning team. They bring that attitude to the practice field and to the game field. They know the attitudes that we need to win football games.”



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**Nick Jackson**  
**Linebacker**

***On the defensive line's performance today:***

"They play with a chip on their shoulder every single day. It comes with their preparation, and this week they did a phenomenal job. I am really proud of those guys that finally got to experience that at home. They have been looking for that all year."

***On stopping the run:***

"It all starts with the guys up front. They played very physical, very fast and they were disruptive in the pass game. They did a heck of a job helping out Jay [Higgins] and I, making it a lot of easier. Big props to the guys up front. They are making plays."

***On big moments for the defense:***

"Everytime we step on the field, we want to get a stop. In those situations, we had the right reaction and made the play when we could. At the end of the day, I am happy that we came out with the win."



# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

## Strategic Communications

Deacon Hill  
Quarterback

***On Purdue's defensive strategy:***

"We were expecting man coming into the game. Probably thought they were going run a little more cover two, but they just decided to go a lot more man."

***On what he saw on the touchdown pass to tight end Erick All:***

"We worked on that play all week. Play action and Erick was going to slip through on the wheel route. I was just trying to get him the ball and let the playmaker score. It was a huge momentum boost for our team, a great drive and a great job by Erick all around."

***On his performance:***

"I think in the first half I was a little jittery, but when I came back in the second half, I did a great job trying to be a calm presence for the team. The offensive line was apologizing to me any time I got hit, but I just told them to keep doing what they were doing. I trusted them 100 percent. This is just everything that comes with being a starter and playing in your first game. I was probably too excited to be out there, but that's not an excuse."



# THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

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**Kaleb Johnson**

**Running Back**

***On the key to returning from injury:***

“My family and my teammates motivating me and encouraging me to stay on top of my treatments. I was down and hurt, and I was sad to be out, but they kept me encouraged and told me what to do. I was able to get it done.”

***On sitting out due the last few weeks:***

“I was hurting inside, but at the same time, I was cheering on Leshon Williams and all of the other running backs, because they are like family to me. So, I love to see them progressing, too.”

***On feeling better:***

“It means a lot, because during fall camp my ankle hurting was really affecting me and my game. After the healing process, I feel 100 percent now. I feel really good.”