

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 25, 2021

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 24, Colorado State 14

KIRK FERENTZ: I think you've heard me say it before, winning is never easy, and that certainly was the case today. First and foremost, we are happy to get the victory, and finish the month 4-0.

Proud of our guys; they've done a good job that way.

Our goal each and every week is to win the game first and foremost and then hopefully improve.

There were some up-and-down moments with that certainly, but especially in the third quarter we saw some growth and good things. We certainly got stress, which is going to help us, and certainly credit Colorado State for the way they played. They came in here to win the football game, and their guys really played hard and did a lot of good things.

As I said on Tuesday, as well, their tight end is an impressive player, and you see guys on film and you're impressed with them, and then sometimes you get on the field and it's either maybe not as impressed or more impressed, and certainly in his case I'd say even more impressed. He's the real deal; just a tremendous football player. I have a lot of respect for him, and again, their whole football team and their approach.

Give our defense a lot of credit today, what they did especially in the second half, kind of buckling down. Jack Campbell did a great job, was all over the place. A lot of good efforts out there and some good team football in that third quarter, but then just a lot of missed opportunities, too, whether it was some things on special teams that didn't look so good, the turnovers was a huge factor both ways, a chance to go in and score and then set them up with a really short field.

Third down was not stellar for us, that's for sure, and then even when we score a touchdown and then we get a penalty. Next thing you know, they have the ball at midfield after we score.

That was kind of emblematic or symbolic of the whole thing. Also, we tried to run around play down there at our end and put the thing on the ground and ended up, whatever it was, 2nd and 30 or something like that.

Just a lot of things that we're going to have to get cleaned up here. The interesting part, I thought we had a really good week of preparation. I thought our guys were ready to go, and it didn't show up on the field.

Got a short week ahead of us right now. That gives us one more challenge, but again, happy to be 4-0, and for us it's as simple as right now we started out it's a seven-game schedule, now it's down to three (before Iowa's bye week), so that's kind of how we're looking at it, and then we'll assess things after that, and starting tomorrow the only thing that's going to matter is the next six days because things are going to happen fast for us.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. How much has Keagan shown that big play ability that we saw today, and especially when it's tough for a true freshman to see the field really at any time?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we talked about that the other day. We have five, six guys in the mix there at that position. I've been consistent in just saying he's impressed us since he got here, and Arland Bruce the same thing.

Really nice play today, and that was a beautiful throw, beautiful pattern and big play for us. That's something hopefully we can continue to build on. I'll compliment Arland, too, because that looked like a dead play when he came around that sweep and then he made something out of nothing there.

Those are two young guys that we really have high hopes for, and it's going to help their confidence having that opportunity today.

Q. Can you talk about the adversity your team faced and how you were able to overcome that today?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, at halftime we're behind and not playing great, quite frankly. A lot of our own doing, some of the things, especially that field position. We put the

defense out there twice on short fields.

It is what it is, and you've got to live with it, and I just told the guys, that's why we play 60 minutes. We always talk about that. Everybody does. But let's play the full 60 and let's try to clean up the things that we weren't doing well and see if we can come up with something maybe a little bit better.

Our guys rallied and they just kept playing, so it's a credit to them. Like I said, especially in that third quarter we started getting a little momentum, a little energy, and good things were happening in all three phases, which we're better when we're doing that.

Q. Connor Colby got the start at guard; any thoughts on how he performed, how Justin Britt is, if he's going to be back shortly?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we thought Justin would be able to go today. He had a little bit of an injury on Wednesday I guess it was, so we thought he'd be able to go, and just couldn't. Threw Conner in there. I thought we were going to rotate them anyway, if not start Connor, because Justin missed a little bit of time.

I don't think it's anything too serious, at least -- I'm not a doctor but I don't think it is. I think with a little bit of time he'll be ready to go.

For Connor, it's kind of like Keagan; this is good experience every snap he gets right now. He's done a lot of good things since we got started, even in the spring. But every snap is going to be important for him.

Q. With the short week coming up this weekend, a lot of travel, does that affect how you prepared for the game today

-- does that affect the week, the previous week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, one thing we've talked to our guys about, not this Saturday but the last two Saturdays have been warm. Last weekend ended up being warmer than we would have thought or was expected and then the week before it was obviously very hot, so we tried to talk to them about being smart and realizing that this takes a toll on you.

Now we're facing a short week. Today wasn't too bad as far as heat. But we practiced normal last week. Maybe just gave them a little break only because we had played two hot games, and one thing at least we've had a lot of practice now in these short weeks, and I think we had one last year plus one that had election day in there, so it was

like a shorter week.

So we've had a lot of experience with that, and I think we have a good plan, but we've got to go out and execute that and we've got to get better in practice, too. That's the biggest thing right now.

Q. Do you ever lay into your team at halftime? Have you ever been that kind of guy?

KIRK FERENTZ: I can think of a game. It's been 20 years, 21 years. I think Jay Hilgenberg commented on it; he was honorary captain. But it was more about we were kind of sleepwalking, but I think we were not quite sure we could do things at that point.

As a rule, that's not usually the approach unless we're just playing... I think our guys were trying today and they had practiced well but it just wasn't clicking for us.

Q. What did you say? What was your message at the break?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're in a game, and I think they all are aware of that, fully aware of that since we're losing, but we're in a 60-minute game, too, and it's in our hands, so there's no magic here. We've just got to go out and play better. We've got to quit helping the opponent, which is a huge part of winning, and then we've got to do something for ourselves, too.

But I mean, the coaches do a great job. They're the ones who do most of the talking at halftime. They give the guys the adjustments, the plan, and then I just give them a 30-second yabba-dabba-doo and then we're out of there. That's kind of it.

Q. One mediocre half has gotten a lot of teams beaten. What's the difference with you guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've witnessed it here, right, in Kinnick and a couple other places the last 20 plus years. I started the talk a week ago, week ago Monday before Kent State. I just kind of cited some all-time disappointing games.

It's about the team. We've got a lot of young guys on our team but we have a lot of veteran guys, and I've been saying that pretty consistently, that I think really they believe and they're trying to do their best. I mentioned the Jack Campbell, Benson and now Justin is catching up lot. He got to play a lot today, and he's catching up.

So we've got a lot of guys that have played and have some experience, have that confidence, and those are the guys that are going to lead us.

Charlie Jones today was huge. Just even complimented him publicly to our team a week ago Wednesday, and I know Ken was worried about that, thought he might tank it, but every time he was out there on those punt returns trying to score, using good judgment and then trying to score.

The guys that have played have had some success and I think are helping lead everybody else.

Q. A lot more throws downfield; what really was behind that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Part of it's the coverage you're seeing and the way they were playing us, we just felt like that might be... things were pretty crowded there in the middle, and we thought maybe we could isolate some guys outside. It was good to have some success there certainly.

Q. Jack Campbell had 18 tackles today, and he kind of told us this before you came in that he felt like he was doubted before when he was first being recruited. If you could think back to what did you see within him in the recruiting process and why he's been able to have success, excel at this level?

KIRK FERENTZ: Reese was still coaching when we were recruiting Jack. I'll say this: I remember his senior year, it was one of the best basketball practices I've ever seen. I've seen some really good ones and really bad ones. Chad Greenway, that's one of my all-time favorite because they had Chad who was out there shooting three pointers, and then he'd look over -- three-pointers, looking over to see if Reese and I were watching. Like why do you think we're here; of course we're watching.

But it was cool because his school was like Little House on the Prairie. I think they had 28 kids in his senior class, so they had a couple seniors and they had kids that were like in eighth grade or seventh grade. But it was a really good practice; it was fun to watch. Jack, I was up there his senior year in December, and boy, it was a really good practice. I think they ended up being state champs that year.

But we were on him pretty early. You just saw that improvement athletically. Like he was just a hack in basketball; he got fouls really fast. He could pick them up. But he's always been a football player, just had a great, great motor, just a high motor, and he's so humble. I mean, he's just a beautiful guy that way.

I don't think it's a surprise the way he's playing. It's just who he is. He's got one speed. He's not Chad Greenway,

but there are kind of some parallels between them. Both he and Seth do a great job, and again, I thought Justin played a lot today, and I think we're seeing him elevate, too, with experience out there.

Q. Spencer hit on several long passes today. How have you seen that area of his game progress over time and how did it ultimately play out today?

KIRK FERENTZ: That will help us if we can mix things in there a little bit and hit some deep balls. It always makes things better. But the coverage has to help you a little bit. Our guys both had a couple there and then they had a breakdown on the one touchdown to Sam. But yeah, he did some good things there.

We're not playing with the kind of rhythm we want offensively yet, and we probably need a little better plan and we need to execute a little bit better.

Q. This is the third time maybe you've won 10 games in a row over the course of two seasons. What goes into that? How do you do that?

KIRK FERENTZ: First thing that comes to mind is turnovers, and we had one today. But that's a big part of it, and that really hurt us in those two previous games, a couple fumbles at Purdue and then three picks I think it was with Northwestern.

Those things, it starts there, playing clean. You've got to play hard. And then sometimes you've got to play through things, too, and today is an example of that.

It takes good players. That's the other -- there are some good players, and we are fortunate there.

Q. Your running game, 54 yards today, it was probably 80 or so without the sacks. What's not clicking and what needs to -- what do you need to grow on really quickly to be the running game you want to be?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the film will answer it a little bit better, and last week I think I said Tuesday I didn't feel so good standing here a week ago, but I felt better after seeing the film.

You've got to look at it and see where things are not quite -- they made it tough on us. They blitzed us a lot in the run game and made it tough that way. We're still -- we've still got some moving pieces up there and moving parts and experience, that type of thing.

But we're four games into it now, so we'd better think -- just what I said a minute ago, we're going to probably have to

come up with a little better plan and we're going to have to execute a little bit better. I think we're capable and we're not going to get too discouraged yet.

Q. Talk about the third quarter; obviously that two-play sequence where Campbell recovers the fumble and then obviously Tyrone Tracy takes it in. How big was that for this team, and do you feel maybe a little weight off your shoulders when that two-play sequence came about?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you always worry about people pressing too much when you're playing from behind. You worry about that, and again, the idea was hey, we've still got 30 minutes. But we have 30 minutes, too, so let's get moving here.

So yeah, when you get a spark play like that, you want to capitalize, and if you can do it sooner than later, that's even better. But yeah, to come away with a touchdown was really big. It was a great call, really executed well, and guys did a good job there.

So that's part of football is just cashing in on opportunities. That's why the team football aspect of the defense sets us up in a good situation. You'd sure rather come out with a touchdown than a field goal and keep building off that.

Q. How big a challenge do you think you're immediately facing with this Maryland game?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's like every week, it's going to be a tough game, and they're undefeated, they've got a good football team. I don't know a lot about them. I've seen a little bit of them, and I've seen them over the last couple years certainly. I know their quarterback was inexperienced last year and now he's experienced, and they must be doing a lot of things right because they're 4-0.

It's still more about what we do and how we can handle the next six days, but we expect this to be another tough game. We didn't do so well last time we were out there. It's been quite a while, but didn't do so well.

Q. When you look at the touchdown pass to Sam, it seemed like there was another almost tunnel screen fake, that that's what allowed the safety to converge and then of course he slipped past him. Is that something you guys had spotted early in the week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we've had it in our playbook for a while. We just thought based on some things we had seen, it might have a chance. You just never know. Ironically it didn't play out quite the way -- the ball didn't go quite where we thought it would go, but that's why you

play; you just never know how it's going to shape up. Fortunately Sam knew what to do with it when it came his way, until he scored.

Apparently you can't spin the ball. I learned that today. I knew taunting was a big thing, but you can't spin it, either.

Q. You didn't know that that was a penalty there?

KIRK FERENTZ: It didn't seem like an excessive celebration to me, but I just -- seemed like taunting was a bigger thing was the message I heard, but taunting and spinning, I'll add that to the list.

Q. Are those rules sometimes ambiguous? A couple years ago you had a guy skip twice and get a TD called back. Last year you had a guy do a backflip and he didn't get penalized. Now you have a guy that spins the football --

KIRK FERENTZ: I appreciate you bringing all these up. Your memory is better than mine. But we lost that player in the backflip, right. But that's a whole different discussion.

But it's kind of like what I said last week, I think one of the things -- I told the guys on the field this today. They make these rules so hard to officiate that it puts a lot of pressure on the guys working the game.

Another one that's big point of emphasis here is the uniform, where the pants are. You're trying to -- is that pass interference, not pass interference, is that a completion, not a completion, let me look at your legs, too, to see -- it's just an awful lot. I empathize with the guys who are working the game because they're just trying to call the game. But that's a tough one, yeah.

But we learned a lesson today. The ball was on the 50 next thing we knew.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Colorado State vs. Iowa
Sept. 25, 2021
Kinnick Stadium
Iowa Player Quotes

QB Spencer Petras

This week did you know you were going to get someone on ones you were going to be able to hit downhill?

They played a lot more cover one than we expected so it was a kind of in a game adjustment and some stuff that we knew if they were going to play cover one its going to leave some guys singled up in the outside and we have faith with our guys 100 percent of the time.

Nico's catch above his shoulder, it was a nice catch, did you just kind of throw that out hoping he could just run under it?

Yeah, you know again cover one, I got hit on that and couldn't see his catch. I heard it was incredible and it was just the matchup, they were bringing pressure and I just had to throw it to where he could get it. Obviously, I hear it's a great thing and that's the thing, you have to trust those guys and let them make plays for you and a lot of times they do, so credit to Nico there.

Could you talk about the adversity your team faced today?

We knew it wasn't going to be easy, we knew it was going to be a dog fight, and certainly that interception at the first half that I threw and them going right back down and scoring, that's huge adversity. Down seven at the half, but I thought we kept fighting, and it wasn't pretty, but that's football. That's going to happen. I am really happy and proud of our team for bouncing back and come out with a win.

Going into halftime, you haven't felt being down this year how did that feel.

We knew on both sides of the ball it wasn't going to be easy. Colorado State played really hard, but a lot of our issues were all self-inflicted, the interception. I don't listen to defensive conversations, but I can tell it was the same kind of thing. That's the same thing every week, it becomes about us and how we do things. Again, it's a little adversity and we fought through it and that's what good teams do. If something doesn't go right, you just keep riding the ship and keep chopping.

You were able to get five passes and over 20+ yards, how good was that for the offense to get going down the field and was it special because they played a lot more cover one?

I think it's big. One of our goals offensively is to have five explosive plays a game, and we have yet to reach that this year. We have been close, I guess just hearing that we reached it today is good. I think a lot of it if you are going to play cover one, we have guys that can win matchups, and a lot of it comes down to our receivers making plays. Keagan Johnson got thrown in there and his first catch was a touchdown and then coming back to him was a great play by him and Nico, you know plenty of nice plays by those receivers with good calls by coach Brian good execution up front.

WR Keagan Johnson

It was single coverage on your touchdown, did you feel like you could stack your guy and that's how it worked?

"Spencer and I, we have that connection that I can win those deep balls. I was hoping I could get off the line cleanly and I did. Credit to Spencer, that ball could not have been thrown any better. I got it and was in the end zone, it was a crazy feeling."

We got to see a lot of your freshman class, what does it mean to be a part of something so special?

"It means a lot. I feel like we have a special class. We are happy for each other and support each other. Connor is one of the hardest working dudes I know; he knows what he's supposed to do, and he gets it done. I also want to talk about Arland too, he's another guy that's a hard worker and he'll show in the future that he's super special. He has an explosive ability and makes big plays."

How did it feel to be starting as freshman today?

"I'm grateful every day. I'm grateful when I run out there for every play. Grateful that I can be out here in front of the 75,000 people coming to watch us play. That means a lot and there's a ton of people that would love to be in this position, I'll never take that for granted."

LB Seth Benson

On the fumble in the second half...

"I didn't really see what happened, I just ran off and then I heard the crowd go crazy. It was a lot like last week on the goal line when that fumble happened, and we got a touchback. I had no idea what happened, and I looked back, and Jack recovered it and I was like 'yeah lets go'. It's something you have to pick up in the second half, raking at balls and creating turnovers to get our offense the ball back with good field position."

On the defensive issues in the first half...

"They have a really good tight-end and a really good football team. We have to tighten down on third downs and get off the field. We need to get off the field and get good field position for our offense. They gave us some looks that we needed to adjust to after halftime."

On Jack Campbell and his 29 combined tackles...

"That's awesome, it doesn't surprise me that he had 18 tackles. He goes about his business everyday and focuses on the fundamentals. He pushes me every day and I try to push him. We rely on our coaches and teammates to go out there and run to the football. It is all about attacking the week Sunday through Friday and Saturday becomes a byproduct of that work, that is what we pride ourselves in."