

University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Friday, November 25, 2022
Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Kirk Ferentz
Postgame Press Conference

KIRK FERENTZ: We didn't do the things you have to do to be successful. Credit our opponent, they did. So it's to their credit.

Can't say how proud I am of our guys. They've been consistent all the way through the season, given great effort. Never gave up tonight. They fought really hard, especially in that second half. So proud of that.

I think the reality is we just made the hill a little bit too high to climb, and part of that was self-inflicted, and that's always tough. Any time you struggle with penalties, you struggle with the turnovers, and give up a big play, those are things we really take pride in doing well and didn't do that tonight. So that is certainly disappointing.

So right now we'll regroup. We'll have a little bit more time off this week than we wanted. We'll regroup. At some point we'll get together this next week here and get ready to focus on this next game and see if we can't come up with a victory here for the last time.

Can't say enough again about our seniors. All of our upperclassmen have done a good job of being leaders, but our seniors, it all starts with them. For those 27 guys to have a chance to walk out there today on that field in Kinnick and meet their families.

Then that stuff in the locker room, the season is not over, but it's their last time in the locker room, last time in the stadium. I say it every year. I don't think anyone who plays football doesn't remember the last game as a high school player and certainly their last game in college, especially at home.

Anyway, just a tremendous group. Really proud of them and proud of the way they've led our football team, and proud of all our guys. They never quit. They just keep fighting.

Like I said, today is really disappointing. We'll get over that. At some point we'll turn our vision to the next opportunity here.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Between the missed blocks, false start on the center, a lot of issues with the offensive line, how do you explain how this is still a problem in week 12?

KIRK FERENTZ: Missed blocks, some of that is protectionally, some things are on the quarterback to understand where guys are coming from. It depends how many guys we keep in protection. Is that what you're referring to, some of the pass stuff?

Q. There's the sack on Padilla where Plumb just didn't even touch the guy.

KIRK FERENTZ: He's blocking in right?

Q. There wasn't anybody in.

KIRK FERENTZ: My point is sometimes they rush six and we have five, then the quarterback has six. It's a little bit more complex than one guy typically.

All that being said, I didn't think the line did a bad job quite frankly. The last drive there, protection broke down a little bit. That's a tough situation. You've got to go, whatever, 80 yards with the last possession.

I thought they gave a good effort. I thought all of our guys gave a good effort. We just weren't good enough tonight.

Q. Cooper DeJean, that injury, it was a little bit jarring to see him lying there a minute and a half into the game. What is his status and how did that sort of affect the game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just got a pretty optimistic report in the locker room a while ago, so that's encouraging. It impacted us a great deal. He's one of our better football players, just like LaPorta or Pottebaum. So any time you take a guy out, that's hard.

If you think about it, it's three corners now with starting experience that weren't here in the second half today, so that's impactful. Then it forced us in a tough situation on the punt return game. It made a big difference. Maybe some of those balls would have been fielded, and who knows, maybe we would have returned a couple of them.

It's a big loss because he's a very versatile, dynamic player, just like Sam. He takes those hits, I guess. You know our guys. They kept battling, kept fighting.

It's tough for a young inexperienced corner, no matter who it is, to jump in there and play against a good player, and to their credit, they went after him.

Q. Was it a concussion protocol he went through?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure. He was done for the game, I know that. They didn't seem too concerned right now.

Q. How big was the loss of Spencer, and what's his injury status?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's his upper body, shoulder. We won't know until probably Monday. Just like the two guys last week, we found out Monday more detailed information, but he couldn't throw the football.

Not to get into a quarterback debate and all that, but he was more rehearsed, more veteran. Nobody can predict the future, what it would have been like. It always hurts any time you lose a starter.

Q. Late in the third quarter, early fourth quarter, you guys were still going through a huddle and the clock was going down quite a bit. Did Spencer Petras' injury have an impact on the tempo you wanted to play late in the game?

KIRK FERENTZ: A little bit, but once we got the touchdown, we felt we had it pretty well measured up. Same thing with the onside kick, do you or don't you, those decisions. We thought we had the game in good grips. I don't think it ended up being a big determining factor, but we were tracking all that stuff.

Q. Coverage on some of the big pass plays, where they obviously attacked your most inexperienced players with some pretty veteran, especially the wide receiver. Was that a mistake in coverage, or was that more you just found yourself in a bad situation based on the coverage?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we were just in a tough situation. Both those guys, Jamison and TJ, have been doing a great job on special teams, which is kind of usually the entree for guys, Cooper last year, not at this time, but midseason he was doing a good job on special teams and started to get some playing time.

So, yeah, both those guys probably fired a little bit before they needed to be. But I'll flip it around, Jamison made a heck of a stop on that one third down play right in front of us. So had we been able to score, might have looked back and said, boy, that was the play of the game.

Gave great effort, as did TJ, but it was a good matchup for them, bad for us.

Q. With everything that was on the line, did you expect your guys to come out more energized?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think it was a lack of energy. I think it was just a lack -- we didn't play clean enough. You have to do that if you're going to play conference football or any football. I'll go back to the thing, we all knew what was at stake, none of us are dumb, at least in that regard.

Again, it's about winning football games. No matter what's at stake or not, it's about going out and playing hard, playing with good execution and playing clean football. We didn't play clean football today, and for whatever reason, that's what it was.

Q. I'm not sure if it was nerves, but after the initial fumble from Alex, did you like what you saw out of him, at least how he was able to finish the game?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought he did a lot of good things, gave us a chance. We didn't get that replay to go our way when we flushed out. Gave it a heck of an effort by both guys. It was a great effort by Alex to keep the ball, looked like it was inbounds, and Arland made a great grab on it.

Again, you don't know what was going to happen afterwards had we gotten the conversion, but it was a great effort by both players.

Q. Can you talk about the comeback and the momentum shift?

KIRK FERENTZ: You play 60 minutes. I don't want to say we couldn't have played worse in the first half, but we really put ourselves in a tough position the first 30 minutes with the turnovers and penalties and giving up the big plays.

The thing we just talked about, still 30 more minutes. Nobody can predict what's going to happen, but if we're not playing hard, if we give up on the thing, you have no chance. So the guys fought and really battled.

We had a couple plays go our way and made some good -- forced some good things to happen. We just came up short. But again really proud of the guys' effort. That's one thing they've done all season. They played through things.

Q. In regards to Keagan Johnson, what have you seen from him recently?

KIRK FERENTZ: First got on the field Monday, which was encouraging certainly. The bad news was we didn't work as extensively this week and it's not -- so the practices were limited. The tempo of our practice was limited a little bit, just like it is on any short week. But it's encouraging because he's back and had a great attitude.

Hopefully it's a step forward right now. It's the first time he's had a full week. Doesn't have much volume for obvious reasons, but it's encouraging.

Q. Did he seem like he came out of the game OK?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's fine.

Q. Your low number of points scored, your low number of yards gained, the sacks allowed, time of possession, pick your stat. Did you guys make progress from Game 1 to Game 12 offensively?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so, yeah. The stat I pick would be the turnovers, number one. Turnovers and the big play. Penalties squeezed in there somewhere. But the combination of those three things make it tough.

Q. When you look at this season as a whole, how are you going to -- since the bowl game is coming up, how do you evaluate this season holistically right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's something I'll do down the road. Maybe we can have more conversation next time we're together. My thought right now is just about today's game. Mostly how our seniors feel.

But everybody involved on our team, all the players, all the coaches, everybody is invested, worked hard. Sometimes when it's bumpy, you work harder and invest more than you do when things are going a little bit better. That's football, and you just keep pushing forward.

I guess the thing I'd remember is the way the guys -- like the second half, the guys don't quit. They just keep playing, keep fighting, and we gave ourselves a chance today. We just didn't have enough gas in the tank to get it done.

Kind of going back to Mike's point, we're a different team week after week. Every week is a different story, but it's your attitude and how you approach the game.

Q. Off of that, 3-4 34 days ago, down 24-0 here, did you learn anything new about this group, not just through that five-game stretch?

KIRK FERENTZ: It really reinforces these guys are looking straight ahead, which is what you ask them to do, keep your eyes up and look straight ahead. They never surrender.

Today is a good example of that. We didn't quite have enough, we made the climb a little harder than it had to be, I think.

Yeah, they're a great group of guys. They're resilient. They stay positive. They really care about each other. That happened a lot today. It's evident in little things you see and certainly evident in the locker room, older guys with younger guys. Just really proud of the guys. They're a great group to be associated with.

Talk about injuries, another guy we missed today, which is not a headline, Jay Higgins, who's been doing a good job with Jestin out and a great special teams player for us, too. You take a little hole here and hole there, it's tough to patch up sometimes, and today we just didn't have it.

Q. Kind of accelerates the offseason -- I should say, the off-season accelerated now, what's next as far as -- you've got recruiting that's vital ongoing, transfer portal also probably going to be moving both directions. Are you starting that now Monday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, recruiting never stops. It's interesting, it's probably less emphasized in December compared to probably five years ago, but you've got the transfer portal and all that stuff. That's a whole different -- that's on the upward trend, if you will. So you have those things.

There's always something to study and talk about and whatever. Football-wise, the difference is last year at this time we were playing the next week, so that of course affected our practice schedule.

We'll go back and reference and give the guys some time to recover, relax a little bit and recharge. Probably have to emphasize more younger player work on the front end so we can start moving toward the bowl then, try to get the whole team ready.

Q. What's the injury with Jay Higgins? I'm assuming you now have a month for him and other injuries to recover.

KIRK FERENTZ: He had a -- I think it was a hip issue. More muscle strain down below. It happened on Wednesday. Kind of freakish, quite frankly. We thought maybe he'd have a chance. Then this morning they ruled him out even before they left the hotel.

So it was just a freakish thing. I would imagine he'll be back sometime next week. Then the other guys, the two that came out tonight, again, a pretty good report on Cooper, and we'll know more on Spencer on Monday.

FastScripts Transcript by ASAP Sports

**Nebraska vs. Iowa
Nov. 25, 2022
Kinnick Stadium
Iowa Player Quotes**

RB Kaleb Johnson

Feeling in the locker room...

"It hurts. We will have to move forward with another game to play and keep our heads up. We have to stay as a team. We've got to learn from our mistakes, I think this is where the learning comes for us. We've got to move forward."

DT Noah Shannon

Why defense struggled early...

"They hit us big maybe 75 yards or more. And then they had another one. Staying with what Coach Parker says: alignment, keys, responsibility. I feel like we weren't there on all three phases so that's how they got those two big plays and turned them into touchdowns."

Missed opportunity...

"Definitely. I feel like throughout the week we practiced with great intensity. We just didn't make enough plays to come out victorious."

Flat start as a team...?

"I feel like we always talk about next man in mentality, but seeing one of our guys down on the field like that... I'm not sure how to say it. At the end of the day, it pushed us harder to fight for him and get [DeJean's] back. I feel like we needed to create a spark play and we ended up doing that, we brought the game back within seven. We fought. Our effort and intensity were definitely there. Just needed to start it a little earlier."

LB Jack Campbell

On emotions as a senior...

"We tried to focus on it as another game, the Heroes Game which is a huge game for us. Hats off to them, they came ready to play. But it was emotional running out onto that field for the last time. Everything that this program has done for me, and those guys in that locker room, it means a lot. It hurts. No one is going to hang their heads. We're going to keep going. We've got one more as a group, together. There is not much more to it. I'm proud to be a Hawkeye and always will be. We got outplayed today. Hats off to them. I'm just thankful for all the people along the way."

On missing a second trip to Indy...

"It would have meant a lot. Obviously, an opportunity to go to Indianapolis is huge. We're going to keep pushing and focus on the next one. We will all look at ourselves and reflect to see how we can change. I feel like it all starts with me. I need to do a better job of making sure everyone, including myself, is ready to go from the first snap."

On senior day...

"Running out of that tunnel, it means the world to me. My mom being there. My stepdad and stepmom, especially my dad and my grandma. They've seen things in me that I sometimes never even saw in myself. So, getting to share a moment out there with them, it meant the world to me. I'm truly blessed to be raised by four incredible people."

On one more game...

"The opportunity to throw the tigerhawk on the side of your head and put that jersey on, that is something that every kid should try to seize. Right now, my main focus is pushing forward. We have another game, and we are all looking forward to that. It will be a reflection, but right now we are going to push forward and keep our heads up."

TE Luke Lachey

On emotions after game...

"It's tough. We never want to lose to Nebraska in the Heroes Game, so it's hard. The seniors played really tough. They are a great group of guys, and we are disappointed we could not get it done for them."

On 1st half woes...

"We just have to get out to a faster start. Penalties killed us and we turned the ball over. Next play is always our mentality. It just didn't work out tonight."

QB Alex Padilla

On subbing in...

"Not a whole lot of thinking goes into it. Spencer [Petras] couldn't go in the rest of the way. I just tried to go in and do my job as best as I can. Put my helmet on. Get in there as one of eleven members... Not too different from what I've done before."

On the senior class...

"One of the most memorable senior classes I think we've ever had here. Coach mentioned it before the game, that coming out of that Ohio State game it all looked very grim, but the senior leadership that we had is some of the best we've ever seen. Guys like Jack Campbell, Sam LaPorta, Kaevon [Merryweather], guys like that kind of willed us to get back on our feet and have a goal that we wanted to win five. We were really close to doing that. I credit that to the senior leadership that we had."

On mistakes...

"We just didn't execute the way we wanted to. Turnovers are killer against Big Ten teams. If you are down in the turnover margin, you are probably not going to win the game. We gave ourselves a chance at the end, but another turnover killed us. Just didn't execute well enough. I thought our guys fought really hard. Credit to my teammates, they played their hearts out. I thought all of us played our hearts out. Just came up short."

On the loss...

"[The emotions] are about as you would expect. It's pretty disappointing. We had a goal coming out of the Ohio State game that we wanted to win five. We won four and had an opportunity to do that today. Just didn't play well enough. Turned the ball over. Can't do that against teams in the Big Ten or else you know you are not going to win the game."

LB Seth Benson

On the senior class...

"The things I am going to remember the most are the guys I came in with. I think of guys like Dallas Craddieth, Matt Fagan and guys that just continue to fight. That's what I am going to miss the most, getting up with each other and going to lift, getting some refuel sandwiches and sitting down at the table before meetings. Win, lose or draw, I am going to miss those moments the most. I am just grateful that we have another chance to go play and get a couple more months with these guys. I think that is what I am going to miss most. Hanging out with the guys, and guys that finished the race, as Coach Ferentz will say. We stayed here five years, and we gave it our all. We would do it again. It just means a lot to us being able to play here. Just going to miss those moments and hanging out with those guys."

On Senior Day emotions...

"I try to keep calm throughout the game, throughout seasons. You can't get too high or too low. Do your job and go about it that way. That's what I try to do. Obviously, it's emotional playing my last game at Kinnick. There are so many special moments here, so many special people here. Special fans here. Obviously, I wish that I could just hang out with these guys forever, but things come to an end. We have got one more, so very happy for that."

On giving up big plays...

"We talk about limiting big plays, and they made a couple of those today. Obviously, those change games."

On the loss...

"It's tough, this being our last time playing at Kinnick. You know, I thought we continued to fight. We had guys out there, like Logan [Klemp] didn't know he was going to be out there today, comes up with a huge play stripping that guy. People who were in there, they fought. We fought until the end. You never know what is going to happen, where the ball is going to bounce. I am just proud of the way we fought."