

**University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Tuesday, September 6, 2022
Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Head Coach Kirk Ferentz
Press Conference**



COACH FERENTZ: Good afternoon, everybody. Just to share a few thoughts about Saturday and then move on to the game this week.

First and foremost, as I said the other day, we're just happy to be 1-0. Obviously not everything went according to plan, but I thought our players showed really good determination, stayed together, focused through the game and did a good job. South Dakota State, we knew coming into it they'd be a tough opponent, and they are. A lot of respect for their program and their players. They did a great job out there.

Defensively just a couple thoughts. Defensively, I thought we played about as well as you can. Obviously there's some things you can do better. But those guys really played a pretty good game, gave up a couple big plays. We'll work to eliminate those.

But saw a lot of good efforts out there, good things.

Then obviously on special teams it was a big factor in the game, too, and congratulations to Tory for being Big Ten Special Teams Player of the Week. He was busy all day and did a really nice job. I thought our protection was good, the coverage was good, and good job by our guys keeping the ball in the plus-50 opportunities. Pretty good job there. That was good.

Then obviously the kickoff coverage I thought was what we're looking for there, as well. So that part is good.

Offensively certainly we didn't get the kind of production we want. Felt like Saturday and after watching the tape, felt like the guys played hard, and really a lot of the stuff is just a matter of execution, and that's our task this week. It doesn't get any easier because of the opponent we're playing, but that is our task right now to clean some things up, do a better job that way, and hopefully put a better game production-wise out there.

Then maybe the most disappointing thing just overall, coming away 0-2 in the turnover takeaway margin. It's not realistic to think that we're going to be able to get away with that and be able to play like that moving forward.

That part we've got to correct and get that straight, set up a score for our opponent, and then also obviously knocked us out of an opportunity for a score. That's probably as big a thing as anything from Saturday.

Shifting forward to this week, our captains, just in alphabetical order, will be Jack Campbell, Sam LaPorta, Kaevon and Riley Moss, so those four guys will represent our team.

Really there are two main things on the agenda this week. First and foremost, our growth and trying to improve as a football team in every way we can here. Every day is critical there.

Then obviously trying to match up against a really good football team in Iowa State.

That's where that's at. It's been a really good rivalry, and certainly Coach Campbell and his staff have done an outstanding job since they've been there and really built a solid and really strong program.

You look at their tape, it's no big surprise, they're well-coached. Those guys play very, very hard, and they're very, very sound in everything they do.

Defensively, it's a really unique preparation. They're very different than anybody we play against. Coach Heacock has done a great job since he's been there. They've had a lot of success. I think it's been a big part of their team's success is the way they've consistently played really good defense.

Offensively, new faces, but a lot of it looks the same. They've been really productive. Did a nice job the other day. Good group of receivers. Quarterback played really, really well and very poised, and they did a good job around the football, so looked balanced that way.

On special teams, got a glimpse at them just a small segment, but I know they've got a good group there, and like always, they play hard and they're solid there, too. That's kind of a synopsis of their team.

I think one thing history has told us in this series, just expect a really tough, competitive, hard-fought ballgame, and that's pretty much been the way it's been year in and year out, 20-plus years. You can go back further than that. That's kind of what we're looking at.

Just to finish it up, happy to have our kid captain with us, Audrey Schneller, and I don't want to mess that name up, but she's from Waukegan, a second grader who I'm told really loves art, loves dance, and doing very well. She had a unique eye disease that she's rebounded really well from, got great care across the street, and glad to have her with us.

It will be good to be in Kinnick Saturday and obviously a big week for everybody.

Q. What's the latest on Keagan right now health-wise?

KIRK FERENTZ: He still hasn't been with the team. He hasn't practiced with the team. He's with the team but hasn't practiced, so I don't think this week you can expect him.

Q. How many more weeks do you think it'll be?

KIRK FERENTZ: I wish I was that smart. It's whenever he's ready. He'll be ready hopefully soon.

Q. When you evaluate what Spencer did on Saturday, what did you see that kind of warrants him staying in that position, and is it more the equity that he's built over two-plus years that's kind of kept him there rather than making a full-fledged open competition?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it is full-fledged. In my mind it is, and every player builds a resume when they're here through the way they practice and when they play. We see more practice than we do game competition.

But I think he's done a lot of good things for us, and he did some good things Saturday. Some things he could have done better. I think overall right now I think our biggest challenge is just a little bit like last year, is just team execution right now, and I want to give him a fair assessment just like I would anybody that's in there.

Q. Is there a health update on Jestin Jacobs and Jermari Harris?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're both -- Jestin will not make it and Jermari is very doubtful, so we'll learn a little bit more today, but yeah, not optimistic on that.

Q. Obviously a different look at quarterback from their end than in years past. You saw him briefly last year. What impresses you about Hunter Dekkers from what you've seen?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, he's a left-hander, I'll start with that. The ball still comes out, so you've got to defend it no matter where it goes. A little bit different. He's got a little Ken Stabler, a little sidearm stuff in there every now and then, too, to get the ball around, so he did a good job. He really looked poised. Made good throws the other day, and they hit some big plays. They've got a good group of receivers. Tough to defend.

But the biggest thing, he just looked like he was totally under control and they did a nice job offensively of executing and kept him clean, and he can pull it down and run it, too, when he needs to, but just a really impressive outing.

Q. I saw that you have Gavin Williams in the two deep; is he questionable or full --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, hopefully we'll get him back. I think we're optimistic there. But we'll know more here as the week goes on.

Q. What about Yahya Black. Is he out?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he unfortunately injured his foot during the game. I think it's going to be a matter of weeks probably with him. That moves Louie Stec up, and Aaron Graves will probably be in that mix, too.

Q. What did you think of Arland Bruce's performance on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought he played really well. One thing I didn't mention on special teams is just the fact that we talked last week about guys being in new roles and both he and Riley, having returned kicks, I thought both of them did a really good job back there. Arland has been just practicing really hard and doing well. He is a really good football player for us.

Q. Spencer obviously didn't have his best performance last week. How long of a leash does he have if things aren't going well against Iowa State?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our intention right now is to go out and play, and we'll evaluate everything as it comes.

That's not prominent in my thoughts right now. My thoughts are more in terms of our entire group. Hopefully we can give them a plan that they can execute well, and if we play well cohesively, I expect him to play well in his role, and that's the biggest thing right now is to give him a little bit more help.

Q. How much do you work the No. 2 guy with the ones once it gets down to game weeks? Is this a typical week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not a lot. We're running the same plays both groups -- I imagine most people do this. Pro football is a little different, but we tend to work two offenses during the course of a practice.

The twos get a lot of reps. Not as many as the ones, but they get a lot of reps. Alex is running the same stuff that Spencer is.

Q. I was told you showed Jack Campbell's answer as far as the team camaraderie. Why did you feel that was important to show the team?

KIRK FERENTZ: Jack just embodies what it is to be a great teammate. I think that's one of the great things about football is people that are good in football understand it's a lot bigger than themselves and they understand there's ups and downs and a lot of moving parts in any football team.

I showed it with a little bit of hesitancy only because it probably embarrassed the crap out of him, knowing Jack. He doesn't do it for that reason.

But I thought it was just a really good message for everybody on our team to hear. Jack breathes it, lives it every day. That's the way he's wired and he's built, and that's in my opinion part of the reason he's such a great player. Just glad he's on our football team. I think it's good for everybody to hear that kind of message in all walks of life quite frankly.

Q. It's not unusual that an offensive line can be a little sloppy in the opener until they get their chemistry and techniques down. It seemed a little more sloppy than normal, I thought, the other day. How did you assess it, and is Jennings Dunker part of it, or he seemed to play well, or is he hurt, too?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been hurt, but he's not hurt.

You touched on one thing and then I'll circle back. I think I may have shared this with you. To the hurt part, we've had a lot of guys hurt over the past year, and you think about Jennings missed pretty much last year, so this is like his first year of playing, quite frankly, in a lot of ways. Beau, same way. A lot of our younger guys last year just missed a lot of time. Really unusual year. I don't know if it was a COVID afterburn or what.

They're really young, and everybody is competing, though. We have a group of 8-10 guys that are competing for playing time, and I anticipate that being a little bit of a fluid process.

Then Part B of that, and I can't remember if I mentioned this last Tuesday, but you watch a guy like Logan Jones, who's probably a pretty good metaphor for our offense in some ways, you watch him operate -- we watch practice a lot. We see practice. We do it every day. You guys get a small window. But he handles himself in such a proficient, productive way. He's a really good football player and a good practice player.

I caught myself the end of last week remembering this is this guy's first year of playing -- first game playing really, and first time he's played center, and Linderbaum went through the same thing three, four years ago.

He didn't have his best game, and I think he'll take a big jump. I'm confident he will, just because there's no way to simulate some of the things he had to do. Just to give you a quick example, you probably can't see this, but we're not all there on the cadence the other day. Some guys are a little slow or the ball is a little slow getting snapped. To me that's your first game. That's what that's all about, and the sooner we can accelerate that process the better.

He's not the only guy in that ballpark. There's a lot of those pictures across the board. That's our challenge. That's the race that we're running right now. The clock is sitting there 3:05 for Saturday, so we don't have a lot of time, so we've got to speed that process up as much as we can. There will be a 310-pound guy on his nose every play this week just to make it that much harder for him, but he'll be fine.

Q. Speaking of sharing things with the team, I think Jack (Campbell) shared this, as well, that Adrian (Clayborn) talked about the '09 opener against UNI. The very next week you beat Iowa State, 35-3. Is there a lesson learned there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, part B, I'm not sure about part B. That was just strictly coincidental.

One thing I learned Sunday is that Adrian is a golfer now, and he looks it, too. He was dressed nicely, has nice golf shirts. I doubt it's the cheap stuff, too, knowing AC. He stopped up Sunday morning, I guess he got a round of golf in and then just stopped in.

He told me he reminded a couple fans around him of that game because he obviously was playing in that game.

I think that's kind of an illustration, I think all good teams develop during the course of the year, and I think certainly that ended up being a really good team, but we were hardly world beaters on that opener, that's for sure.

The point there is it's all about what you do moving forward, and there are going to be bumps along the way. We'll have bumps later on in the season, too, but it's how you handle it, how you respond, and certainly the '09 team did a great job, not only that next week, but moving forward, and that's where we need to be focused is what can we do to get better and improve and fast. That's our topic or our task. That's kind of the deal there.

Q. There was booing at various intervals in the game Saturday. Are your players alienated by that or are they conditioned to shrug it off?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I haven't asked anybody, but everybody on the team is human, so I'm sure they hear it. I'm going to say it's unfortunate, but it's just -- it is what it is. It's sports and that's the world we live in today.

Quite frankly, my bigger fear is social media. Has been and will remain that way. I just think we're -- for one things, it's changed. People booed 20 years ago, too, but the social media world, and as you might imagine, I don't spend any time on it, but I know our players do, so I worry about that probably more.

Q. We saw it again South Dakota State and then last year against Penn State that north end zone difference with the false starts. How much of an impact has that renovation made?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, it's just awesome. First of all, it looks great. It just dresses up our stadium. We've already had an unbelievably great stadium, but that just adds to the environment. One of these days if we ever get into an overtime game, I'll promise you that's where -- we're going to pick that end for sure to put our opponents. But I think it's just added nothing but great things, and certainly makes it a little bit louder down there on the field.

Q. When you look at their defense, it is built a little unique, I guess, 3-3-5, although it does sometimes look like a 4-2, and in particular No. 9, Will McDonald, has been a force for them for a lot of years. What are the challenges for a young offensive line to pick up that scheme, and then second of all, No. 9, what can he do that can make things very difficult?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, two things on that. It's a little bit interesting because you think of that league as a tempo scoring league. But this defense to me holds up really well against any kind of offense. Like it's a real challenge. It's a challenge to match up with it in a week's time, and we are not big on working on opponents during camp or spring ball. We used to do that a little bit in the '80s. So that's a challenge in itself, and then on top of it, they've got really good players and they're very well-coached and they're very aggressive.

Then to your point about No. 9, he's probably an illustration of why their program is good, because with each and every year, you've seen him take another step. I thought he was a far better player a year ago than he was the year before that, and he was good two years ago, as well. We didn't play them but saw him on tape, so he was good, whatever year that would have been, '20 I guess. But boy, last year

this guy was playing and he was playing even better now, which you'd expect. He's just a really good football player, very sound and also very, very explosive.

Q. We didn't really see much of Elsbury or Plumb on Saturday but I see they're first team on the two deeps. What role do you see them playing on the offensive line?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're both in the mix. I mentioned we've got eight, nine guys competing for playing time right now, so they're certainly in the mix.

Two different stories. Tyler hasn't played as much as Jack. We've seen Jack play on the game field and play well, and I think Tyler has improved with every phase. We're just keeping an open mind there, too, and trying to figure out what our best mix is.

Q. Receiver-wise, obviously everyone is dying to know when reinforcements are on the way, but is Ragaini on track for next week? And Vines' name came up today. I know he's not in your future, but what's his timetable?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, so he's probably further down the road. I can't tell you when. Nico is improving and gaining ground, so that's reason to be optimistic. But I don't know if it'll be next week, the week after. But somewhere down the road he'll be back I'm confident this month. I think we got time for that.

Then Vines I think is further down the road. I just said that.

Another thing of note, I guess, now Brody is back practicing, but the race he's running is he's missed a lot of time. Really didn't do anything in the spring. He was playing baseball, and then last year was out with injury most of the year. So he's running a race against time, but at least he's out working now and getting quality work.

Q. When you look at LaPorta splitting out wide for for a few snaps I would say the other day, how does that -- does that help him or does it help your offense to have him out wide or does it take away from what he is so effective because of his match-ups that he can do on the inside?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, hopefully we're going to utilize him in a way where he can be effective whether he's playing traditional tight end role or as a receiver.

But yeah, we're putting him out there. We think he can do some things and add to the offense, and part of it's by necessity, just our lack of depth at the wide out position, and he gives you that flexibility. Stanford did the same thing that Rose Bowl year, the guy they had that year.

I think he's got a unique skill set there, and we feel good about our other tight ends on top of that. Feel really good about Luke. He's done a lot of really good things with each phase.

It's just trying to figure out what's the best match-up or the best way we can mix our personnel and get some mileage out of them.

Q. You mentioned social media, and social media has really taken shots at Spencer. I was just curious --

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't imagine. Just guessing.

Q. Do you feel like the quarterback maybe gets a little too much credit when the team wins, too much blame when the team loses?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's an age-old story. Just the way it is. But if you're a quarterback, you have to understand that's just part of the territory.

Again, my encouragement is our guys -- I'm not against social media. I want to go on record saying that. Don't want social media lovers hating me.

But anyway, I'm not against it, just my biggest concern is how much time get absorbed by people with it, and it's kind of a real popular thing, I get that. There's a lot of other stuff on our guys' plates, and again, most of the stuff that's on there I'm guessing is probably pretty predictable, depending on how things are going during whatever it is you're doing.

I'm not sure where the suspense is for people that do go on it looking for feedback.

My other thing, I'd just encourage people to seek out opinions of people they really respect and never worry too much about a stranger.

Q. At quarterback I know there's examples in the past of your guy being a better practice player or a worse practice player than maybe he was on game day. Can you think of good examples even if it was in the '80s -- Hartlieb maybe?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's the best story, easily, because I was convinced he was clearly No. 3. One guy was a first-round draft pick, but it didn't work here for him.

So yeah, you never quite know. But I think we've got a good gauge on both guys. We have confidence in both guys. That's the good news. I've been saying that consistently, and my opinion hasn't changed.

We're just going to keep pushing forward and see where this goes.

Q. What has Joe Evans meant for this team?

KIRK FERENTZ: Joe, I don't want to call him a total surprise, but a little bit of a surprise, high school quarterback, linebacker, but the biggest thing about Joe, first thing I think about is just his energy and his tempo. When he's playing, he does it one speed, and he's undersized, quote-unquote, undersized, but he's just worked so hard and really has figured out how to play that position in three, four years' time here. Gives us a lot of energy, a big burst out there, and right now we're fortunate we have a little depth so we can rotate guys and keep them fresh. But yeah, Joe has been a great team member and really productive football player. Very disruptive.

Q. When you look at Connor Colby, he moved outside the other day. How did he perform at right tackle, and do you anticipate him staying there or do you think he might move back inside?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've got some flexibility there, first of all. But our intention right now is to keep him out there.

Again, I talked about players playing first time in a new spot. It's a learning process for him. There were some times just technically he did some things like a guard that a tackle can't do, so I think those are easy fixes, quick fixes, but now it's a matter of doing it under game pressure, and that's a big difference, too. You do something in practice and you get in live competition, all of a sudden you revert back to some muscle memory stuff, habit stuff, and then it shows up.

That's part of the challenge for him, but he's doing a good job.

Q. This game hasn't been played here in almost four years. Some of the guys haven't even played this game at Kinnick Stadium. What does it mean to your team to get this one at Kinnick finally?

KIRK FERENTZ: The bigger point there for me is just like the COVID year. It was weird in a lot of respects, obviously no fans, all that stuff, late start. But maybe one of the weirdest things is, to your point, the series. Like for us looking back historically, we got last year and then, whoa, it felt like 10 years ago, the '19 game. It took 10 years to play it on top of it. (Laughter.)

But it's almost like that game, dismiss it, throw it out. It's just is so far back, even though it wasn't that far back, but the lack of playing every year, it's weird. It's strange.

But all that being said, it's still Iowa-Iowa State and it's a big game for everybody in the state. It's certainly a big game for both programs. I don't want to speak for their side, but I'm sure they're like us, everybody on our team wants to win this game. They want to win it.

It's a big game. It's another cool aspect about it. I think it's probably the only BCS Power Five intrastate rivalry where teams are in different conferences. I think that's still true. I probably should check my little roadmap thing.

Q. Georgia-Georgia Tech, Louisville-Kentucky, Florida-Florida State --

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't keep track. There was a time where people were in the same conference in the same state except for us. Now I'm dating myself, okay. Still a cool rivalry.

Q. Xavier Hutchinson is one of the better receivers in the country. I don't know how much you've watched their offense --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, enough to know who he is, and be worried about him.

Q. What challenge does he present for your secondary, and especially because there's some new faces there?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's a really good football player, and then on top of it they do a really good job of moving him around, so he's not always in plays. You don't know where he's going to show up, and they did a nice job the other day of getting a personnel mismatch and they made the opponent pay for it.

But he's a really good football player. He can run. He's going to catch it, and he can run after the catch, too. He knows how to get open. He's a really good player, and they use him well in their scheme. That's for sure.

Q. Considering they don't have the tight ends that they did last year and without Jestin Jacobs, do you anticipate this being more of a cash type of defense this week because they do run three wide receiver sets?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll see how it plays out, but if they're in three wides we'll probably be in cash. That's kind of a common thing for us.

But they'll do some two tight end stuff and get heavier, and those guys did a good job Saturday. If they do that, we'll make our adjustment with our personnel, be it Logan Klemp, or we've got some position flexibility with some of the other guys. We'll figure that out. But it will probably be a mix for us on Saturday like most times.

Q. How did you see Logan Klemp step up there when Jestin got hurt?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did a good job, and he's an older guy. It wasn't a surprise. He's been one of our really core special teams guys, and I talk about that all the time. That's really where you learn how to play, at least defensive guys. They start out there, and he's been really dependable, very productive that way, and I think everybody respects the work that he's done on special teams, not only this year but going back.

So I think that makes it easier when you get in a situation like that. He looked comfortable out there and played well.

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