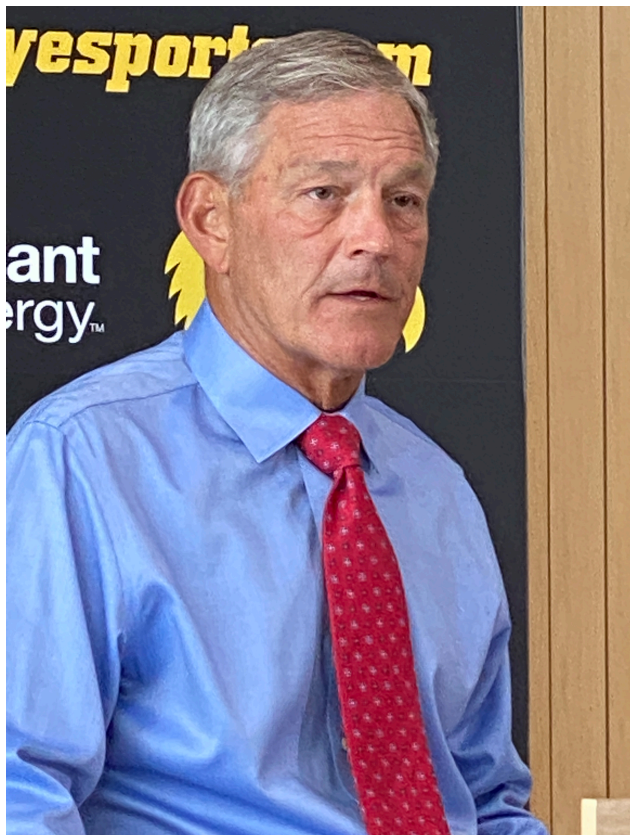


University of Iowa Football Media Conference
Tuesday, September 14, 2021
Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Head Coach Kirk Ferentz
Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon.
Appreciate everybody being here.

Needless to say, happy to win this past weekend and be 2-0 at this point. Going into the game we knew it was going to take great effort and great focus on our part to be successful. Certainly we knew we were going into a challenging environment. It was hot. Fan base that's really engaged. A veteran team that's extremely talented. We knew what the challenges were.

I thought our special teams were really big in our success certainly. Starting with our specialist, Tory did a great job. Happy to see him recognized by the Big Ten. He just did a great job affecting field position all day long for us.

Certainly Caleb did a nice job out there, field goals, kickoffs. Charlie Jones continues to play really well, too. Happy about those guys.

Our core players are doing a nice job, making a difference in the game. That was good.

Defensively, for the most part we played really well. Lapse before the half, gave up a big play, which was really costly. Didn't finish the game out real well either in the fourth quarter.

Offensively there was some good effort, some good plays. Certainly we don't have the consistency we need right now. That will come hopefully. Part of that, too, is certainly a credit to Iowa State. Their defensive ballclub has been really good. They're a tough group to move the ball against. Consistency is tough to come by when you play them.

Shifting gears right now with Kent State coming in. First and foremost, just compliments to their program. Coach Lewis has done a really good job. I think one stat that really stood out to me was the fact that last year that was only the second

time they've had consecutive back-to-back winning seasons since the '70s. That's a long gap. Coach James got that started out out there. That's a big gap.

I think it just tells you a little bit about what the coaching staff has done, their vision coming in, more importantly the player buy-in to that vision. They've done a really good job there certainly over the last couple years.

They're an offensive-minded attack group. Coach Lewis, that's his background. Up-tempo, RPOs, they've got a good line, the line coach is a coach I've known for a while, Coach O'Boyle, good skill players.

Certainly the quarterback is an outstanding football player, a big part of what they do. He really kind of makes them go. Not the same as when we played Mississippi State a couple years ago, not the attack, but similar in that that quarterback was the catalyst of that football team all season long. Certainly you can see it right now with this guy.

Definitely another multiple front team. Give you a lot of different looks. They're unique compared to the teams we're used to playing. Kind of like we've had three very different preparations now. That's a challenge for us.

On top of that I think you probably noticed they're great in the takeaway column. They're second in the country I believe right now with takeaways. Just tells you a little bit about their ball hawking ability. They're opportunistic defensively, both corners have three picks. Pretty impressive right there.

Special teams, same thing, an aggressive approach. They're very, very aggressive. Their players, you can see they've bought into what they're selling in that regard. So three different phases that play well and present some challenges.

George Barnett on our staff has been in that league the last seven years or so. Their feeling going into this year was this team would be a leading candidate for the team of the year. They certainly felt the quarterback was as good a player as there was in the conference. That's what we're up against this week. It will be a challenge for us.

Captains are the same four as we had last week. Tyler Linderbaum, Matt Hankins, Jack Koerner and Spencer Petras, and add Ivory Kelly-Martin as the fifth captain. He got enough votes to be a captain. Adding to the mix, that's a good thing.

Injury-wise I think we're fairly healthy. Guys nicked up coming out of the game, as you might imagine. Kyler Schott is working back, started working back last week, got some work in last week. He'll play some this week. I don't know how much, but he'll play some. Good to get him back in the team. Certainly will be a good thing.

Last but not least our kick captain this week, I don't want to say her name incorrectly, Galilea Gonzalez. Young lady who is a 10-year-old. Had heart surgery her first week after birth. She is a healthy 10-year-old right now. She is from Cedar Falls, so I am guessing Jack Campbell might be her favorite Hawkeye on that one. Good to have her with us this Saturday.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Their tempo is well known, similar to Iowa State, how challenging is that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Didn't do so well against it either. It is always a challenge. The challenge starts on Monday. Hard to simulate that. Just like if you play an option team it is hard to simulate. There are things you do in practice, but you can't get it just the way it's going to be during game time.

It's one more adjustment, one more uniqueness. Seems like we've had weeks of uniqueness here in our preparation.

But the biggest concern for me, I think for all of us, is the quarterback, the way he plays, the things that he does. That's where it all starts. It doesn't end there, but it starts there for sure. That's part of it, too. You need a quarterback with confidence and savvy to run a tempo like that.

Q. Any concern right now for the offense? Seems stagnant for the first couple games.

KIRK FERENTZ: 'Concern' is not the right word. But certainly interest. As I mentioned, I think the biggest thing right now is consistency. We've done some good things at times, other times not so good. I can't tell you it's unpredicted or unexpected.

I look at our football team, going back to coming out of August, we're young in both lines in a lot of areas, from an experience standpoint. Look at the offensive line, take Schott out of there, which we have the last couple weeks. We expected some bumps, at least I did. Thought that was going to be part of the process.

I'm really kind of pleased actually with the way the guys have held up. We knew Saturday would be a tough contest because of the people we were playing against, the whole picture of it. I thought they did a lot of good things.

What I would be concerned about is if we don't see continual growth. That's kind of what we're banking on here as we move forward. That's for our whole football team, but especially up on both lines because that's where it shows a little bit more than other places.

I think if we can continue to grow, continue to improve, we'll have a good chance to be a good offensive football team.

Q. A couple of freshmen on the offensive line. Mason Richman, Connor Colby. What have you seen from them?

KIRK FERENTZ: I like the way they do things, that includes practice. It starts with practice actually. Just the way they work in practice. A little different in terms of Connor is a little bit younger. He's been here less practice time, game time. Mason has a little better sense of what we're doing, how to do it, all that type of thing.

Both those guys have done a really good job. They're not overwhelmed by it. One thing about Mason, this is important for every player, goes back to camp.

VanValkenberg worked him, Monday second week or whatever. The next day he

came back, he stood right up to it and did a really nice job. He had some scar tissue, but he didn't carry it with him.

That's what you're looking for in players, a guy to come back and take the challenge, try to learn from what might have gone wrong. That's kind of how he's wired, does a lot of really good things out there. He's coming along. I've pretty much seen improvement in all these guys. I think all of us have seen that improvement. We've got a lot of room to grow right now.

Q. When is the last time you started an offensive line this young, especially to open a season?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's a good question. Yeah, probably when Jackson and Wirfs were playing tackle for us. Walking out to the field behind Boone Myers, Ike Boettger (both were in sweats). It dawned on me here is two fifth-year guys that aren't playing. A first-year and a second-year, tandem we just talked about, they were starting for us. Those guys were really good players, NFL players today, but they weren't there. They were young guys learning how to play.

You pay some dues along the way. We paid for it then, too. But it paid off for us down the road. Yeah, that's part of the territory sometimes.

Q. Ballpark number of how many players you've signed over the years that either have been thoroughly committed to MAC teams or MAC teams is their number one choice?

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't give you a ballpark number. I've joked about that a lot of times with our staff. We waste a lot of time recruiting. We should wait till the MAC schools get their guys lined up and go poach.

I call it the MAC All-Stars. There's an article a couple years ago about one of the Super Bowls where they went through all the guys in the MAC. I tell you, it was very impressive.

Twenty some years ago when I got here, the best quarterbacks in the country were from the MAC. Roethlisberger and Marshall had a couple. They've had some really good players in that league. Especially Kent State ironically.

I say it half jokingly, but that's how fine a line it is in recruiting, too. What you can't measure a lot of times are intangibles with players. Jovan is maybe a good example, maybe half a step slow, but he played pretty good for us for four years, then made it with the CFL.

Q. For players have verbally committed to Iowa and then... Is it just law of the jungle?

KIRK FERENTZ: It is. To me it's recruiting. Coached at Maine three years. Division I school offered one of our guys after they committed, big fish, little fish. That's just how it works.

We've had players taken by other 'universities' that were more noted. In particular, down in Tampa in '08, that game, we had a tight end committed. A bigger school

took him. I'm not sure they even needed him. I think they just wanted to make sure we didn't get him. I really believe that. Nonetheless, we didn't get him.

That's recruiting. Until guys sign the papers, nothing is written in ink, literally. That's the way it goes.

Q. If you see the player has three or four offers from MAC schools, would that make you think he'll take a look?

KIRK FERENTZ: Depends on who he is. I'm not big on that game of copying. Recruiting is a big copycat business. There are a couple schools in the country if they have offers from those schools, I'll pay attention a little bit.

Yeah, that carries some validity. But probably the rest of the story on that is actually watching guys through their senior year, which is how recruiting should be done, like it was done 30 years ago. Let guys play their whole careers and evaluate them. That's what the NFL does. You get a better picture of the guy after his senior year.

We have a lot of guys in state who we've offered January, February at times, end up being really good football players. George Kittle going to Weber State, I'm sure Weber is not happy with us. They probably understand it's a better deal for George. Turned out really well. Interesting. Dynamic process with these guys.

Q. One of those guys, Riley Moss, kind of surprised a lot of people. Two-star, track athlete. What did you see with him? Did you expect him to play defensive back right away or work him in?

KIRK FERENTZ: We were thinking defensive back. I think it was just about this time, sometime in September, I believe, when we did offer him. I can't remember who went to the game. Somebody went there in an early-season game. We just kind of reassessed things a little bit.

Again, that's where your senior tape means a lot, it really means a lot. Having players in our camp helps us because at least we get a feel for their personalities, those types of things.

We weren't sure about Riley, but pretty sure now. I'm glad we offered him. He's a great kid besides being a really good football player.

Q. In that class in particular you had a couple from Indianapolis who were highly sought after. What did he do so well early on to put himself in this position to where he's starting?

KIRK FERENTZ: Came in and went to work. It's like everything in life, you got to realize if you're trying to do something competitive, which he did yesterday, it's important. Knew you'd be proud of it and all that. What's in front of you is probably more important.

That's the hardest part. Sometimes guys don't have that ability to keep that in mind. Like it's not over. It's the start of something. This is the start of a new chapter, so you get measured by what you do. That is why walk-ons have done well here. We look at everybody with a fresh eye, at least try to. Whether you're a

fourth-year guy on fifth-year guy, you get an opportunity to go out there and see if you go. It's just what you do with that opportunity.

Q. Most of the players you recruit, do they understand the tempo or you have to teach them?

KIRK FERENTZ: Some do, but not many. It's not a knock on anything or anybody. It's just the speed of things are a little different. College football has changed so much, too. Last 40 years, 50 years, just incredible changes. It's a year-round activity now. It's a lot. You got to go to school. That's a lot. You're expected, held to a higher standard than the average student.

Nobody is complaining about that, but there's just a lot on everybody's plate. It takes some guys -- some guys walk in and have no problem with it, other guys it takes a while to get game traction. Sometimes you see that in careers, too. Some guys are spinning their tires a little bit. Might be year three, four, five, where they really take off and go.

As long as a player's trying, you just never know what's going to happen, how they'll develop. But it's hard to really prepare somebody for that until you do it. It's like anything, it's hard to do till you start trying to do it. It's hard to appreciate it. The guys that go to the NFL go through the same thing. Yeah, they're prepared, but still the speed of everything is just a little bit different.

That's part of the acclimation process.

Q. You've been ranked high before in your career, but not ever this early in the season. What does it take for a hundred players to handle those types of high rankings?

KIRK FERENTZ: To get a hundred of them to understand that, we're batting a low percentage on that one. It would be really good (smiling).

Probably the biggest message, I would say the same to anybody that asked, at this time of year, I've always said this, it's kind of like recruiting rankings. There's speculation, a lot of speculation, because nobody knows.

This time of year, especially venture to say right now there's probably a small handful of teams that are worthy of being ranked high. I think after whatever it is, three, four teams, it's a jump ball for a lot of teams.

Right now it's really more about speculation, projection. But I know that. Hopefully our players understand that. We've won two games. We're thrilled to death to be 2-0. It's the best you can be. But it means nothing.

Nobody is smart enough to know what it's going to look like in November or December. Hopefully we're in that discussion, but there's a whole lot of work to do between now and then to still be relevant at that point.

Q. Does the offense take longer to develop or is it just a testament to the defenses you faced?

KIRK FERENTZ: A little bit of each probably. Again, I think as we came into the season, my biggest concern was our inexperience on both lines. Still is that way. I think that's where we have to gain ground.

The guys did a good job during the preseason. I thought we improved a lot, have improved a lot. That's all you can ask. We'll continue to improve. We'll start to mesh a little bit better. As long as we practice well, we've got to go out and play on Saturdays, because there's no substitute for it, game action, all that. That's what you're working for.

I'm not standing here saying, Geez, I don't know if we're going to make it. I feel good about our chances of becoming a very good offense. But we're not there yet. I think we're all aware of the work we need to do.

Q. The officiating crew for your games thus far has included women, which is becoming more and more common. How important is it for your players to see women prominent in sports?

KIRK FERENTZ: To be honest with you, I haven't thought a lot about that. All I hope for is the people that have jobs do jobs well. Hopefully that's how people look at the world in general.

I have respect for any official, anybody that's working those games that works hard. Typically I can say this, being back now 20 some years, 22 plus years, in our conference my sense is we have people that are really committed. I can only think of one official in the last 23 years I can't say nice things about. He didn't last long in the league. I think other people figured it out, too. For the most part these folks are out there working really hard. And it was a 'he'. I give that away, right?

They work hard. They care about what they do. We have a crew in here every August, they work one of our scrimmages, do our clinics with us, educate us on the changes. When you get to see guys in a professional environment like that, you understand, hey, they know the rules better than we do typically. They take pride in that.

Robert Smith is a guy, obviously we know him very well because he's one of ours. Unfortunately we never get to benefit from his expertise because he's an Iowa grad, can't do our games. I know how serious he takes it all.

That's all you ask from anybody, whoever is working the games, whatever role they may be in. I have total respect for people that are prepared and go out and give their best effort.

Q. If you think back to the 1981 Rose Bowl team, led by the defense. Even though it's 40 years ago, is it fair to draw some similarities from that team to this team?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've already done that behind the scenes, just in kind of a joking way. I'm hoping our offense will develop. I think it will.

But that's kind of how we won. We let Reggie change field position. We had a defense that was extremely ornery. When we got field position, we just got points

out of it. Played two quarterbacks that year. Things weren't perfect, but we found a way to get it done.

Ultimately that's the objective, is to win games like that. It's not win at all cost, but we're keeping score, so we're trying to win each and every week.

How you do it doesn't matter to any of us. It's just about what can we do to be successful. I'll go out on limb here and say one of these days we're going to be in one of those 41-48 games, too, which I hate. It's going to come. That's football. That's the ebb and flow of football.

You never know what it's going to be. What good teamwork is is everyone playing off the situation, getting the job done.

I don't mind telling you having a punter who can impact field position, boy, it's a treat actually. He's an unbelievable kid. Like you guys have met him, right? He's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. Unreal. What a story.

Q. Have you seen this coming from Tory?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. I was hoping he was good, but, like, wow. The best part, he has no idea what he's doing half the time in terms of football. He does as a player. The rest of the stuff, it's an adventure ride for him. He's enjoying life. He has such a good approach. Just really underwhelmed by all of it, what he's doing. He just goes out and plays.

Q. A lot of your defensive players have said they're closer than ever this season. Do you know what maybe contributed to that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it starts with they take pride in what they do, what they're trying to accomplish. They're a good group of guys. Start with Matt Hankins to give you an example. Had he left here after last season, I would not have been surprised, that is the trend right now for players to leave, a national trend not just here, that's just what young guys do now. I think that showed a lot of wisdom and judgment on his part. Probably three years ago he wouldn't have done that, I don't think. That's the way he's evolved and developed. Start there.

You got a guy like him who is really a good player, a really good guy, a good leader. He's developed into a really strong leader. There's an example right there.

All these guys are really unselfish guys. They just want to play hard. They don't care who does what. They're generally happy for each other. It's good to see developing stories, too, like Jestin getting that play the other day. Last year it was Koerner knocked the ball out, right, on the turnover. Here's another one. Boy, those were huge plays in the game, both last year and this year. Two different guys. This year Jestin Jacobs. It gives him a little bit of, Hey, I'm part of this, this is fun. We see that growing. It's good to see.

Q. In a world with individualism, how are you getting them to buy into this mindset it's not about individual statistics?

KIRK FERENTZ: You can do both. You can be an NIL star I guess. You can be savvy on social media. That's a big, big part of it sounds like. You can still be a good team

person. That's all we ask. When guys are in this building, playing together, in the huddle, they put all the other stuff aside. Our guys do a good job of that. They're really pretty good that way.

It starts with our leadership. Matt, Jack. When your older guys are onboard, it makes it a little bit better for everybody else.

Q. Are you aware one of your former players became a world champion last night?

KIRK FERENTZ: I saw the thing. I'm not aware of the details. He is a good guy.

Q. What do you remember from him?

KIRK FERENTZ: We recruited him late. I remember that. He had some real physical issues. Took a medical redshirt. He had a tough challenge that way. But a great guy. Really great guy from the Tampa area. I think it's been neat that he's gone on and had this great success.

I don't follow it that closely. Is he the pancake guy?

Q. Yes.

KIRK FERENTZ: We get trucks for our kids, grandkids. Not my kids. You get the picture. Yeah, whatever his nickname is, Big E. Pancake connection somewhere in there?

Q. Yes.

KIRK FERENTZ: All right. Anyway, yeah. I think it's great. I think it's really great.

Q. Kent State, what have you seen from the rushing attack? Defensively, their defensive backs, what do you see with them?

KIRK FERENTZ: They do a good job of really making you defend the entire field. They spread things out very well. They have good skill guys out there. The roster just overall, high school guys recruited, the quarterback was under-recruited from right there in Lorain County, not too far from Kent. Then they've got a lot of transfer guys. Picked up guys and benefited from that regard from all kind of schools, Penn State, Syracuse, right down the list.

They make you defend the entire field. Their backs do a good job. I mentioned their line is well-coached. The quarterback, he'll keep it and take off. In the run game he'll hand it off. They're pretty fearless with their tempo. They played at Texas A&M, they went right after them. Took the ball right down the field, ended up with a field goal the first drive. They just make you defend everything. Everybody's got to be on task. It's not the same as the last few weeks, but similar.

Their corners, they're opportunistic, they're where they should be, the football is in the air they're going after it. Tipped balls, those types of things, they're good, aggressive players.

Q. Your third down conversions have been an issue, what needs to change to see improvement there?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's an area obviously we want to do better in. That's part of our whole offensive production. Two of the biggest stats are third down, staying on the field, the other part is getting in the red zone, getting touchdowns, not just field goals.

The other day field goals were really important, what have you. Last year we did a nice job of really doing a good job ending up with touchdowns instead of field goals in the red zone. Defense, you're trying to do the opposite. That's an area we're going to try to keep working on, probably do a better job getting open and making those conversions. There was a third-and-15 where we had a chance to convert it and didn't. Those are plays we have to make. We have to make those plays moving forward. Can't get away with that next time.

Q. How would you evaluate Spencer the first two weeks? Seems like he managed the game pretty well.

KIRK FERENTZ: Protecting the ball is really important. I didn't see the game last night, but I was told two turnovers last night on the losing team. That's a formula that doesn't change. I know it's not very popular. You don't get a lot of points for that, but there's a lot to be said for that if you're smart with the football.

You can't do it at the cost of being so conservative you're afraid to do anything. That doesn't work either. There's a fine line there.

I think Spencer has done a good job of that. Every player has plays they'd love to have over again. He's got a few from last week. I think it was another step in development, playing in a tough environment, tough defensive team. They gave us some wrinkles, expectedly. We didn't know what to expect, but we expected some things we maybe hadn't seen. They did a good job with that. They seem to do it all the time.

I thought he handled it pretty well. It's just kind of like our whole team. I think we're going to grow. Thinking, hoping, wishing, all that stuff really doesn't count. We've got to get that done. That's what we're focusing on right now.

Q. A couple of the sacks he took, what do you tell him to do to speed things up, throw the ball away?

KIRK FERENTZ: Being a former line coach, I'm a little sensitive to that at times. I've learned through that my career, to think we have to get it out of there, you're the guy back there with the ball, it's a little different. A lot of times, not a lot of times, sometimes you're waiting for something to develop and it doesn't quite get there in the time you'd like it to. It's a real fine line. That's part of the process.

Again, I think it's part of our whole team right now. It's not just that one spot, but it's a whole team just doing things a little crisper, a little sharper on detail, those types of things.

What I do feel good about right now, I feel like we've got the right guys after going through a couple game weeks, going through the August pre-season, I think we have enough to end up being a good offensive team. We're not there yet, but I

think we have that. It's just a matter of us really getting it done on a day-by-day process, not just week-to-week, but a day-by-day process. Hopefully I'm right and we'll find out here in the next month or so where we're at.

Q. You mentioned last week the aggressiveness level differentiates, time, down and distance location, score. In the second half, are there any discussions in a game like this of protecting the ball is number one, the priority, throw it away, versus if you're down four with four minutes to go, let it fly?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're all talking that way. We all know each other well enough to understand. The way the game was going Saturday, what you don't want to do is blow an opportunity and start getting reckless, whatever, for statistics, whatever. Things could have fallen through.

But our defense was playing pretty well. We're doing a good job with special teams. The clock was really our friend and ball possession was our friend. We would like to run the ball better in the second half. We didn't do that. At some point we're going to have to get better at that in those kinds of situations.

The biggest thing that could have screwed Saturday up is us turning the ball over in the second half. There was no need to be reckless or crazy at that point. That could blow up in your face, too. Sometimes you go with the feel of the game. There's some games where you feel like the momentum is going a certain way and you play to that circumstance.

**FastScripts Transcript by ASAP Sports
Provided By Iowa Athletic Communications**