

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, September 26, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



COACH FERENTZ: Like always, talk a little bit about the weekend and look forward to this week's game.

Going back to Saturday, it was a tough loss, disappointing loss for everybody involved.

One thing we always talk about, it's always a team loss. Anytime you come off the field without a victory, that's certainly the case. And everybody's got ownership. Coaches, players, everybody's got ownership. It's always been that way. Always will be.

Circling back to touch on one thing. I was asked after the game if I have any concerns? And maybe I missed the obviousness of that question, but anytime you lose a game you're concerned about everything. First and foremost, it's your players. That's the first thought I always have after a game or during a game.

And that's certainly the biggest thing. Losing is tough. It's always been tough. It always will be tough. There's nothing fun about it. Nothing enjoyable, certainly. And when you think about our players, it's true at every level, this is what they're invested in. This is what they're trying to do well.

To come up short is always disappointing. Certainly the case there. And same thing with our staff. The one thing I've said consistently, and I'll continue to say, we have a quality group of people, and we'll keep pushing forward.

Again, it is challenging, and the reason is everybody's invested. I know full well the player's investment over the last nine months. I know the coaches' investment, and there's an emotional aspect, too, anytime you come up short and it's not much fun. Never has been. Never will be.

If you learn anything in your time, if you're paying attention, it's basically it gets back to just getting back to work. And two things, you have to stay together as a group, staying together as a team, and work to push forward.

And I don't think it changes much off that. It's a lot easier to talk about that than actually do it, and it's all about the doing that's going to bring on better results.

So that's kind of where we're at right now. And coached at every level, high school, pro, collegiately, it doesn't change. Losing's losing. It's not much fun. And the key thing for us right now is to work on solutions trying to get better.

We're moving forward now to Michigan State this week. It is our second Big Ten game, first one at home. Our captains are Joe Evans, Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey and Cade McNamara.

Kaleb Johnson and Jaziun Patterson are out another week, at least. Michigan State comes to town and they look a lot like what you would expect of Michigan State: They're big; physical; good athletic ability and certainly have talent at every position.

As we look at them, a lot of parallels from what we saw a couple of years ago. There's been a leadership change there, but beyond that, the coordinators are all the same. Systematically, don't expect them to change a lot.

Kid Captain is Wyatt Reynolds, nine-year-old from Cedar Rapids. Basically had health challenges since birth. A heart transplant at six months, if you can imagine that. He's a healthy nine-year-old right now. I've been told he's eager to be on the field. Had a chance to wave up at him at the hospital. Looking forward to having him with us on Saturday.

Also, it is a special week having Robert Gallery back, to see him honored, prestigious to be obviously selected to the National Football Foundation Hall of Fame. That's a big thing.

And on top of that, to go into the Kinnick Stadium Ring of Honor, just two great salutes to him. Very well deserved. One of the finest players I've ever been around. Great to have him back with us on the sideline.

Expect a great crowd. Should be a great environment. So our job right now to try to get ready here for the kickoff and see what we can do on Saturday.

Q. Offense is ranked 100th or worse in a lot of key

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statistics. What realistically can you do in season to right the ship?

COACH FERENTZ: Just try to get better in every phase. There's no magic answers; see what we can do to just improve in each and every phase.

Q. When you evaluate the offense, what are the areas that you're looking at specifically in the passing game that is not measuring up to what you want or what the players want you to?

COACH FERENTZ: I would still attribute part of that, obvious answer, said it for a while. Our starting quarterback got injured four-five weeks ago. He missed a lot of time. Missed a lot of time last year. To work with this team, this group, everything's connected.

So the more we practice, the more we do better in practice, have better execution, hopefully it will show on the film.

Q. Wide receivers have been targeted 35 times over four games. 14 catches. What is it about the group that's not getting involved as much as just the ball goes where it goes?

COACH FERENTZ: I think part of that is the ball does go where it goes. We've had two pretty good tight ends. Obviously, down one there. That changes.

As a staff, that's something we're doing weekly is trying to figure out what's the best way we can do to help improve production offensively and getting receivers involved probably makes some sense here as we move forward.

Q. Consciously, do you go into a game saying, hey, we have to get our receivers more involved?

COACH FERENTZ: It's the personnel group, who you have available. We were playing a little bit more three wide last week than prior.

But at some point we still have to block and protect and throw and get open.

Q. There were times you had transfer quarterback, transfer tight end, two transfer wide receivers out there on the field. Does that make it more challenging with communication and knowing that everybody is where they need to be?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. In general terms, not necessarily. Cade's work was limited, been limited the last five-six weeks here. Limited in the spring and then Seth (Anderson) didn't work at all in the spring.

Had a lot of moving parts. Erick was limited in the spring as well. So in a perfect world, we would have had eight-nine weeks of cohesive work every day out there on the field. Just haven't had that.

Keep working. That's not the only area we've got to get better at. We have to get better at everything we're doing.

Q. Regarding the offensive line, Coach Barnett around for three years now. Talked to Logan and Nick about him a little bit. They continue to add votes of confidence for him. You did that in the preseason. What does he do well, and where does that confidence come from for coach Barnett?

COACH FERENTZ: From the players, it's earned. You earn everything from your players. And it's the way he is. It's the person he is and the kind of coach he is. He's a tremendous football coach. Outstanding human being. The players recognize that. I think they can tell.

It's been a tough task. We've had our challenges up front. He walked into a very challenging situation. I think he's done a great job pushing it forward and we'll just keep working.

Q. What were your impressions of the O-Line from watching the film on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: There wasn't a lot that looked good on Saturday, quite frankly, in any area, outside of Tory's punting, if you had to find a highlight. That's the important part about winning. If that's all you have, that's not going to be good enough.

None of us performed well enough, coaches or players, well enough to be competitive and be successful.

Q. How do you hope your wide receivers become confident in the game plan if they're not really a part of it or they're not contributing?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not that they're not part of it. The ball hasn't gone there for whatever reason. They're certainly critical. Everybody is. All 11 people are critical out there.

We'll have to find a better way maybe to spread the ball a little bit, and again Luke being out -- that's part of the deal. Just keep working and keep chipping away at it.

Q. From an injury standpoint, aside from the existing lines of Luke, Kaleb, Jaz, Cade mentioned that his hand didn't seem to be a problem. Did you get out

from Penn State mostly unscathed?

COACH FERENTZ: Not too bad. Hopefully Saturday we'll be at full strength other than the people you mentioned.

Q. You mentioned that the coaches had some areas of improvement in that Penn State game. What were some of the areas they could improve on?

COACH FERENTZ: We get judged on performance basically, and how the players perform, that's our job to get them ready. Clearly Saturday, we were not competitive compared to Penn State. It was a thorough beating, quite frankly. We all have to do better. There's no magical one area; just everybody has to do a little bit better, a little more.

Q. All the guys brought up the 24-hour rule, win or lose, it's just part of it. But how important is it in your experience having that one day to kind of sit and sing, so to speak, and then get out of after a game like Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: It's important. It's a lot easier, like a lot of things it's a lot easier to say it than do it. And losses tend to linger. We took one. You have to move past it because what you can't do is let it impede what's going to happen this week.

And clearly we need improvement in every area right now. We've all have to do a little better job. We've been in that situation before. It's never fun. It's not easy to put it behind you. It's easier said than done.

But at some point you have to do that so you're not burning time on something that's already happened and wasting an opportunity maybe to get ready for this one.

Q. When you talk about not seeing a lot encouraging from the O-Line on Saturday, what do you think needs to change moving forward?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not any general area. It's that they played better than we did. Credit to them. We knew they're a good football team. And they played an outstanding game. Credit to them.

It's not one specific thing. It's pretty much across the board, we didn't compete at the level we need to. We got a good taste of what it looks like. Now we've got to get on the train and get to that level.

Q. You mentioned the running backs. Does that mean they will be back for Purdue --

COACH FERENTZ: We'll take it week-to-week. I don't think we'll know. If they were out for the season, I'd let you know that, but that's not the case. Hopefully sooner than later.

Q. Is one better than the other?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll take whoever is ready to go, we'll take them when they get back.

Q. Erick All was targeted seven times at Penn State. Receivers were targeted less than that. Is there an imbalance in the play calling? Calls more for the tight ends, or is Cade not seeing the wideouts, or just more comfortable because he knows Erick better?

COACH FERENTZ: I think there's always a little bit of that. With every quarterback there's somebody they feel more comfortable with. Obviously, they played together. I don't know if it's the entire story. That's probably part of the story.

We're going to continue to work to try to get the ball a little bit to everyone, but basically you want to get it to where it's going to help you move the ball and score points.

Q. What has Jay Higgins done so well this season?

COACH FERENTZ: He plays so hard. He prepares extremely hard. He plays extremely hard. He's totally invested. He's done a great job being a leader on top of it. That is something we're cognizant of. You lose a guy like Jack Campbell and Seth Benson in the middle of the defense, and that's why going after Nick was so important. We felt he was an older guy that embodied some of those characteristics that Seth and Jack had.

Both those guys, I think, are playing well. And Jay's been here so he knows this system. He has been invested in it and admire the effort he plays.

Q. Along those lines, whether it's Jay, whether it's Jack before that, you had a strong track record at linebacker. What is it that's led to that consistent success at that position?

COACH FERENTZ: "Selection" is not the right word, but for us to be good defensively, that's just a critical position. Probably most teams are that way. But the way we're wired, if you go back historically, the guys up the middle are really a big part of what we do.

So if you have two inside linebackers or two safeties that can't tackle or won't tackle, it's not going to work too well. But I think if you look over the long haul that's been a

commonality.

It takes the right kind of guy to be there and all the guys we've had have been very different. Don't have many -- Jack Campbell is a really unusual body type and all that, and he's an unusual person.

But it's kind of like football. It's kind of like life. There's all kinds of shapes and sizes, all kinds of personalities. But the bottom line is can that player play effectively at that position. And fortunately to your point we've been lucky. We've had a lot of good ones at that spot.

Q. The players were talking about the speech that Cade McNamara gave after the game. It really fired up the team. Can that serve as a turning point in your season just in your experience?

A. I think it's positive. Turning points are -- we'll know those at the end of the year. We'll go back and look. But it's a positive, certainly. That's what you hope everybody's thinking, everybody's feeling.

The words that he spoke were pretty much what I jotted down in terms of what I wanted to share with the team, too. I think we're all on the same page. I think we all know what we need to be doing and what we want to be doing. Now the trick is can we go out and do it and do it better week by week here.

Q. What were those words you jotted down or wanted to say?

COACH FERENTZ: Basically what I started out here, just at the start of the press conference. You stay together and you work for it. That's really the way it goes. I think he also added nobody wants to remember this feeling because you don't want to experience it again.

And not to minimize anybody outside the team, the framework of the team, but again I'll go back. It's painful to lose. It's really painful. The reason is these guys invest so much. It's kind of the same thing I talk about when a player's injured and is going to miss time.

This is what players work for. That's what they live for is the opportunity to go out and compete. If you can't do it, that's disappointing and certainly if you come up short that's not that much fun either.

I know the fans are not happy. Everybody's not happy. Believe me, the players are less happy and the coaches are less happy because this is what we do. We live it.

Q. You're playing a team this week that had a sudden

coaching change. You play another one in a few weeks. Is there anything to be drawing from this that maybe people in your profession are just have feet of clay as much as anybody else?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, the lesson learned is don't try to anticipate how that team's going to play because Northwestern is a great example. I think people had them dead and buried and they didn't get that memo for sure.

It's the world we live in. It started a while ago. Probably the one that was most prominent in my mind was USC making the change when they did, last year, two years ago, whenever that would have been.

But the more the world changes, the more we're becoming, moving in that direction. We're becoming a little more like the NFL.

Q. You hit the portal, got a new quarterback, some wide receivers, a tight end. And the constant kind of over the last few years is scheme and play calling. Has there been any discussion of altering any of those, maybe making a change of play caller to change things up for different results?

COACH FERENTZ: That's not part of the plan, but every week -- we've done it for 24-plus years -- after every game you go back and look at what you did, what could you do better, whether it's play calling, what are our thoughts going into the game, those types of things, how the opponent matches.

And we've been doing that for 24, 25 years offensively, defensively, special teams. It's part of what we do on Sundays. And then you shift over to the next opponent.

So I mean we're going to try to do better. There's really no simple answers or easy remedies. It's a matter of execution, playing better and trying to do what our players are capable of doing a little bit better.

Q. This team has been to three BCS bowls or New Year's in '02, '09, and '15. And in each of those instances, within two years prior the team was really not performing at a really high level execution-wise. So you've been through improvements before. You've said that there isn't really much in the way of, like, a magic tool or anything, but how do you get that level of execution and performance from -- even back up to the point where it's one of the best in the Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: All I can do is speak do my experiences. It's all I know. And my experiences are based on things that I've observed. I do try to pay attention

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-- when it comes to football stuff; there's a lot of stuff I couldn't give any opinion on or commentary.

But, so, yeah, the way I choose to move forward, the way I choose to make my decisions is based on what I've witnessed other people do or not do. Going back to the concept of changing coaches, I'd love to do a study on that, how well that works out.

Thinking about a situation in the NFL probably about 40 years ago where they went from a stern coach to the players coach and it worked beautifully for eight weeks. Then a total disaster a year later. That's always something that's in the back of my mind.

The idea is to figure out, at some point you have to understand what you believe in and what you think is important in terms of core things, and then try to make your adjustments around the periphery if you will.

But I think you just stay the course and focus on improvement. It's kind of what we've done. We've been in situations after four games where we've had a loss or two losses and things turned out okay. Despite as bad as it was or as hard it was, things turned out okay.

Been in that situation where it didn't turn out so well, nobody knows the answer. That's really the reality of this whole thing.

So it's all about what are you going to do? All you can do is worry about today, trying to make today better. And then we'll turn the page tomorrow and try to have a great Wednesday practice and then move from there.

But to move the needle from here to there in one week's time, probably it's just a matter of trying to do things a little bit better and hopefully it will show up on the field.

Q. When you look around the country, spread offenses, with throwing the ball just seems much more prominent in this game now versus the past. You see wide receivers putting up crazy numbers. And you go back to the wide receiver targets at Iowa, 35 through four games. When you have guys in that room kind of see how productive are the receivers are being, how do you keep that room engaged with the game plan, how do you approach?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't have a sense that they're not engaged. I think we have a great group much guys in there. Nico is a really good football player, veteran player. Diante had a really nice play the other day. He's healthy. I think he's confident and feeling good.

We've got two guys that are a little bit younger and developing. So I think that room's fine.

I'm not minimizing stats at all, don't misread this, but the biggest thing we're trying -- the only stat we're focused on is winning games. It's not all about winning, I know it is for a lot of people, but it's not all about winning. But that's what we're doing each and every time we go out there. If there's a scoreboard, we're going try to win. That's why you work hard for nine months.

So that's the stat that we look at. Every game, every situation, what's going to give us our best chance to win. And those are decisions we'll continue to try to make as we go along.

Q. Artificial intelligence has been a big talking point and topic. It's sort of trickled into the sports world with some of the social media videos of fake Brian Ferentz and Matt Campbell. Have you seen those videos? Any thoughts, comments or frustrations?

COACH FERENTZ: I heard one on the radio last Wednesday, I believe, not regarding anybody in this building. Clever. They almost sounded authentic. Maybe they were, for all I know. I've got some artificial intelligence in my head, too, so maybe it was authentic.

As we get smarter, I think sometimes we get dumber, quite frankly. That's one observation I'll make over the last X amount of decades. It's interesting.

It's clever, entertaining, all that stuff. A lot of people must have a lot of time to do stuff. I promise you we're not doing that stuff. It may look at it at times, but we're not doing that.

Q. When you look at your opponent this week, you'll see a familiar face. How much influence does, do you think, Mark Dantonio have on this program? And secondly, the battles that you guys waged for a decade or so were as physical as any I've seen.

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, Mark did an outstanding job, just outstanding job historically. Coach Perles going there in '83. And Nick showed up in, whatever it was, '95, I guess. And Mark having the impact he had. So a lot of big wins.

You hear amazingly they ran the ball a lot and threw to their tight ends, all that stuff.

But the commonality, all three of those coaches I mentioned believed in defense. So the impact he'll have, I think he'll probably just give them some stability, and it's got to be a challenging circumstance.

My guess that's like his number one role. And then being a good sounding board for Coach Barnett, to give him somebody to bounce off of, that will be invaluable.

Q. What was it like preparing for those teams and the games, some of the more legendary games in the Big Ten in the past 25 years?

COACH FERENTZ: The first one that comes to mind is '09. It was a last-play victory. And that kind of sums it up like it was always tough, tooth and nail and always hard, physical. They were a really good football team.

I guess then you go to the championship game, too, same story.

So that's kind of the way it was. Even going back to the '80s, we had some amazing games that, again, went down to the last minute. So seems like when we get together it's going to be a tough contest.

Q. Are you worried about the amount of time the defense has been on the field through four games? It's 20 snaps more per game than your offense. And what can you do to fix it?

COACH FERENTZ: As much as anything, just to give it perspective, really, Saturday -- if you want to be a stat person, Saturday's going to throw everything off the books because we weren't out there on the field and we couldn't get off the field.

So as I said earlier, outside of the punting, really wasn't a lot of good things to take from it. We didn't spend a hell of a lot of time on the film either just for that reason. I don't think it's representative of who we are or where we're going, what we'll find out. Time will tell on that one, too.

But no, to answer your question, we'll just keep playing.

Q. Social media is part of society now.

COACH FERENTZ: I've heard about it (laughter).

Q. What are the challenges that come with having to deal with that outside negativity? And do you offer any advice to the guys of how --

COACH FERENTZ: All the time. I'd be a fool not to acknowledge it. I don't look at it and I don't partake in it. But I'd be a total fool not to acknowledge it and understand the importance.

I know this. I know it's important to a lot of people. And

most of the people that I work with on a daily basis, especially the younger people, boy, I'll tell you, I know it's a huge part of their life.

If we were to give them some advice at least try to address that a little bit. I haven't read it. I don't know what the narrative -- I could probably figure out what the narrative, take a good educated guess at it.

So my point there is just, like, you've got to really consider the voices, consider the sources and really worry about what is pertinent to your life and your job and what you're trying to accomplish here. It's kind of what it is.

Q. Is that what you tell them?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, absolutely. And it could be people that love them, but they probably don't know the whole story every little detail type of thing. But how could they? Why would they?

There's a lot of moving parts with what we do. And I think the biggest thing is just stay focused on what we're trying to accomplish and stay focused on trying to improve.

Q. You've had some great battles with Mark's MSU teams. What do you remember about 2010 when everything swings in your direction and you're up 30-0?

COACH FERENTZ: And then they returned the favor a couple years later. Those you don't usually see coming. It's kind of like Saturday. We had a good week last week, and I felt we were ready to go.

But it didn't work out that way. I'll tell you. There's nothing fun about it. You coach long enough, whether it's Arizona State, I remember a couple. I remember being in Pittsburgh on a Sunday night, 1995. We hit a slam play for 50 yards. Had it called back and that was the end of the night. It was a slaughter after that. Somehow we still played. You keep going.

You don't see those ones coming. That's what's crazy about sports and crazy about football. You don't always know what's going to happen. You're on the right side, there's nothing better; if you're on the wrong side, not so good.

Q. Is your philosophy since you started coaching, head coach, has it changed much on how you believe the best way to win football games over the long haul, not the emotional week-to-week but seems you stuck to your guns and you believe in the system --

COACH FERENTZ: I think you have to. I didn't pretend to know everything in 1999, when I got here, and I certainly don't at this point. In fact, I think most of us could tell you the more experience you get, the more you figure out, boy, there's a lot of things going on that need some clarity on.

But, yeah, as I said earlier, at some point you've got to have some beliefs and you continually examine those. You re-examine those and probe and prod and all that kind of stuff. But you have to be true to something. I guess that's life in general; you've got to be true to something.

All I know is what I see with our players on a daily basis, what I see with our coaching staff. And I guess I'm an optimist to some degree. And history has taught me if you keep pushing forward, maybe some good things will happen. You've got to give yourself a chance, though, and it's just a matter of, you can't worry about bad things, missteps along the way, because what we do is extremely challenging, extremely competitive. To think we're going to skate through it on defeat, as much as we try and we want to, you always have to be prepared to deal with the opposite end of it.

That's all you can do. You analyze, learn from it and hopefully you move on and improve from there.

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