

**University of Iowa Football Media Conference
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Head Coach Kirk Ferentz
Press Conference**



COACH FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Thanks to everybody for being here.

I'll say a couple words about Saturday and then look forward to this week's game. As I said after the game, disappointed with the outcome, but certainly not the effort. Our guys gave good effort and competed hard. Coming off the field, I felt that way, and the tape verified that.

We knew going in that execution was going to be paramount, and then taking advantage of any opportunities or creating opportunities, and you play a team like that, the margin for wiggle room is pretty slim.

A quick example, in that first half we were having a hard time getting off the field defensively, and then offensively we had two early possessions where it didn't make what I thought was a convertible 3rd and 3, and the next

possession we missed a pass that would have given us probably 2nd and 2, maybe a 1st down, that type of thing.

Those are illustrations that we have to be able to do if we're going to be able to continue to sustain a drive, and then in a game like that, that's critical because it's a two-way street as far as that time of possession. Both sides have ownership.

And then also, special teams-wise, we didn't impact the game. We had a great respect for their specialists, but we never really influenced the game or impacted the game any way on special teams. I thought it was better in the second half. Saw some progress there. Our guys fought hard and overcame some tough circumstances, too, and fought until the end.

Some positives came out of the game. Looked at the tape on Sunday, made the corrections that needed to be made, and we have shifted our focus forward.

Heading into this week against Illinois, same four captains. Jack, Sam, Kaevon and Riley.

Injury-wise, not a lot to report other than it looks like Terry Roberts is doing better. He was pretty limited last week. Didn't play much in the game. He's having a better week of practice right now, so that's encouraging. Hopefully we'll get him back this week and that'll help our depth a little bit in the back end.

Then obviously facing a big challenge this weekend, traveling on the road, night game again, and playing an Illinois team right now that's playing really well.

They're basically three points away from being undefeated and coming off a very impressive road win up in Madison.

Last week, they played good team football, complemented each other, took advantage of the situations they did create, and got a really good road win there.

Two big stats that factored into the game, and it's a credit to Illinois. They were plus 3 in the turnover takeaway margin and controlled the ball rushing the ball, but they made plays in the passing game, too, that were impressive, and they held Wisconsin to two yards.

You look at their team, they're strong up front on both sides. They have an outstanding running back, not just a good running back, very productive. The receivers are making plays. Quarterback is a newcomer who has done a very nice job for them. He's playing really well right now.

Defensively, they're pretty much nationally ranked in every category, doing a good job there. A little bit of a unique preparation for sure.

They have earned those stats. They're playing well right now, playing with confidence, and are very aggressive. They're a talented football team, very confident and we're going on the road to play in a tough environment.

It's going to be a big challenge for us .

Last but not least, our kid captain is Cormac Faley, who's a 12 year old from Asbury, fighting leukemia for a lot of his life, and then had his last treatment two years ago. Doing really well, so obviously he won't be with us at the game, but certainly will be in our thoughts.

Q. Going up against another team that can run the ball effectively as you were mentioning earlier, how do you make sure this is a better outcome than last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: A lot of the same challenges because these guys are balanced. They're doing a great job in the passing game and diverse with what they do. A lot of different things in their attack. So they make you defend the entire field.

The back is not the same as last week, but similar in that he's a really tough runner, runs hard and makes the extra yards. He was really good last year, too.

They've lost a couple guys off the offensive line, but they have a J.C. transfer who's done a good job, and they're still good up front, so we have a big challenge. We're going to have to do a little bit better getting off blocks and hopefully getting to the ball a little bit better.

Q. Everybody talks about Illinois' running game, but it seems like Tommy DeVito maybe has provided them more stability at quarterback. How vital has he been to making that offense click?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's been playing better and better week by week, which being a newcomer you'd kind of expect that. I thought he played a great game Saturday and made some really nice throws, and then the receivers went up and made some plays, too, which helps on top of it.

It wasn't just one guy. They had three receivers pitch in and do a nice job making contributions.

They overcame some crazy circumstances, too, went for it on 4th down a couple times and converted that and had a touchdown called back and then turned right back around and still went in there and converted.

Q. It's not even halfway through the season yet and two Big Ten coaches have been fired. Are you surprised by that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Today or 10 years ago?

Q. Today.

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not at all. Disappointed but not surprised. I think it's the fifth one this season, right? The toll has mounted. Ball kind of got rolling last year.

The one big one I remember was USC the second week of the year, and my question would be if it's that bad, why didn't you do it a year ago or a half year ago.

But that's the world we're living in right now. I'm not surprised but disappointed.

Q. Would you ever anticipate changing up your staff in the middle of a season?

KIRK FERENTZ: For what purpose?

Q. Any purpose.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, if you thought it was going to serve an end, yeah, absolutely. But I've never been in that situation as an assistant or a head coach. Certainly as an assistant I never thought I should be changed out. That was never on my mind. (Laughter)

Q. In relation to Paul Chryst, the success that he's had, 67-26, even their down period has been 60 percent winning percentage, did that catch you off guard knowing the way Wisconsin usually operates?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's not surprising but it's surprising. You think about the success they've had, but again, I'm not privy to all the details. I'm not there, so I can't comment on any one specific.

I just brought up USC. That one kind of caught me off guard at that point because it was week one or two. That was surprising to me. But you never know what's going on behind the scenes, so I don't want to give commentary on one specific situation.

Broad-based, though, it's kind of like us picking up two schools from the West Coast into the Big Ten. We're living in different times now, operating in a different world, and we live in a very reactionary world, too, right now. That's obvious.

The fact that most of expansion has been driven by TV I believe, at least with that in mind, and I'm going back 10 years there now.

We basically are in the entertainment industry, and some things come with that, and that's kind of what we're seeing. In some ways we're becoming a little bit more like the NFL. I wish we had the structure of the NFL. That's one wish I would make, and maybe in the future we will.

Q. Do you think the television revenue is encouraging schools to act quickly like this, knowing that there's so much money coming in?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know all those details, but that's the world we're living in right now. It's a results-driven business, and it always has been. That's not new.

But there's a lot of other things going on in college football, and I've coached in both arenas. When you coach in the NFL, there is no responsibility, accountability towards the players' graduation, towards their personal lives. Somebody else deals with all that, and we didn't deal with graduation.

I think that's one of the rewarding parts about college is seeing people that are really changing -- kind of like high school coaching, you're watching kids or young people in real developmental years of their lives. The 2002 team was just here. 20 years later now you see these guys as young adults, or even Tony who was here last week at this time who, younger than those guys yet, starting his family, all those kinds of things. Those are the fun parts about college coaching. You kind of miss that in the NFL.

It's a little different train coaching in college, I guess. I've always looked at it differently.

Again, times are changing. We all know that. NIL, transfer portal.

Q. Do you think it'll ever go back to anywhere --

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think it can right now, but again, I think my biggest concern about college football is just our lack of structure right now. There's really no framework, a firm framework that we're operating from, whereas in the NFL it's very clearly defined. Every part about it is very clearly defined.

That's one of the things I've always enjoyed about working here. You walk in every morning knowing what the expectations are, and they've been very consistent.

But we live in a changing world. We all know that, and you've got to change with the times.

Q. Spencer was talking about earlier with two six-game seasons separated by a bye week, every game is important. Is there maybe more of an importance getting a win going into that bye week, getting momentum going into that week?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's like winning a bowl game. It's a lot better to go into the offseason after a victory. To that point, there's no downside to winning games ever that I can think of, and there's not much upside from losing.

But what we've tried to do, and it's so cliché and so mundane, but it's week to week in college football and any football. Any football level I've ever coached at, all three of them, you just try to focus on the opponent and matching up as best you can.

Right now we're fully focused on that because we have to be, and we're playing a good football team that's playing very, very well.

We'll reassess things once we get to Sunday, and the only reason it's six and six, that's how the schedule shook out. Nothing too creative there.

Q. Gavin Williams has been quietish lately. Is that injury, workload related or just schematics? What's kind of the cause of that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it has only been, what, one week or two weeks? I'm losing track now, where we had both guys -- I guess two weeks now with Leshon back, too. Yeah, Gavin was out for quite a while longer than we'd thought, and the injury was a little bit more extensive than we had hoped initially. So yeah, he's working his way back.

The other guys are doing a good job. The way I look at it, right now we have three guys that we have confidence in, which is one more than we did maybe two weeks ago, so that's good news.

He'll get his share.

Q. You mentioned their aggressiveness on defense. Wisconsin only got two yards rushing. That catches your eye right away. What do they do defensively against the run that presents such a problem?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, when you watch them, there's a lot of guys up there. You'll see that right off the bat. It just makes it a little tougher to create run lanes. Their linebackers fill pretty well. They know where to get and where to fit, and I think the biggest thing is they're very well-coached team-wise, and that's true no matter what your defensive style may be or whatever your scheme may be, but you're going to see more guys up on the line than you would typically.

But the key thing I think is they're well-coached and they know where to be, when to be there, that type of thing, so they don't leave big seams for you, and it's hard to create them. That's going to be a hard challenge is just trying to -- I'm sure they'll have a wrinkle or two -- but they pretty much are what they are, which most good teams are like that. We sure as hell knew where Mississippi State was; we just didn't know what to do about it.

That's the challenge. You're just trying to -- I only bring them up because of the statistics, where they rank statistically. The challenge is to try to find a way to block them basically is what it gets down to, and that's easier said than done. Nobody has done it very well.

Q. You seem to be getting some good numbers when you run a jet sweep or jet motion whether it's in the pass or in the run. Are you getting what

you want out of that? Do you feel like there's room to take it to another level?

KIRK FERENTZ: They definitely have a role and a place to fit in with your offense. You can't make a living on them, but you certainly can complement what you're doing.

Part of that, you have to be somebody who's capable of taking the ball and going with it, too. I feel like we have that, that we'll continue to use those.

Q. Is the main focus for that just to kind of create uncertainty eyes-wise at the second level to, okay, there's movement --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just try to get people to settle a little bit, not just run to the ball, which is, again -- I'll divert this whole topic. That's part of my problem with the rules that we're making right now. Guys on defense can just fly to the football, not have to play blocks, but at least that's another way to do it without getting in trouble with the rules people.

Q. Did you supply anything to the Big Ten or hear from the Big Ten about any of the officiating stuff we discussed on Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're going to send the tape in. We're in the process of doing that. I just had a text exchange with someone in the office and just asked them to consider looking at them, if they can -- I just want to get some more explanation on a couple things. That's all. That's hardly urgent because this game is in the books, but we'll have a conversation, and it'll be good. They're always good with information.

Q. Yahya Black does he have any chance come back this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not this week, but he's on the upward path right now, so it's encouraging.

Q. Diante (Vines), any change?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not this week, no. Really nothing new. Just Terry (Roberts) looks good, so we'll see.

Q. The offense looked a lot better late in the third quarter that one drive. Looking at the film, can you -- is it encouraging to see the improvements even though it happened maybe a little later in the game? Is all improvement created equal?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's what I was trying to articulate on Saturday. I felt like from the sideline, I felt like we were growing and making progress. That's a feel thing. That's not the best seat in the house over there on the sideline. But the film confirmed that, and I thought -- I get to peek at the replay board at least, so you see some little things maybe that you didn't see a week before or two weeks before, and those things were there.

It's encouraging. That's why I referenced those two drives in the first half. Like those are makeable plays, we just didn't make them, and we need to make those if

we're going to expect to drive the ball, especially against a tough opponent, which we faced last week. We've got another one this week.

That's conference play. You've got to make the plays that are out there. You have to make those, and then hopefully you can do something on top of -- we did a little of that in the second half, and we had some -- whatever it was, 30 plus yards, two runs that were 30 plus yards brought back, but the good news is we were in negative situations due to the penalties and overcame some of those. That was encouraging. It was encouraging to see our guys fight through that and play through that and not give up because it's third and forever or second and forever. They kept playing, and we've just got to play better. We've just got to keep -- we've got to grow faster.

Q. When you're game planning for a running back like Chase Brown, how important is it to limit the big play because last week against Michigan it seemed like there was only one or two runs that broke 10 yards. How important is that?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's always important on defense. Big plays, period. The more you can make a teamwork, the better chance you have of getting them off the rails. But to Michigan's credit last week, they just kept going. They were patient. Took what was there and did a good job and were able to sustain drives.

The odds go up that somebody is going to make mistakes if you can keep them on the field longer, but you give up the big play, boy, it's tough to overcome those. Too many of them in a game, it's goodnight.

Q. What do you see as the next step in Logan Jones' development?

KIRK FERENTZ: He just has to keep playing. He has improved every week, and we're not surprised by that, but there's only so much you can do. You can only practice so long.

There's a time limitation, but just realistically, if you want to have a guy ready on Saturday, you've got to be smart during the week, too. He's maximizing every snap. He's got a great attitude. Just has to keep playing.

Q. I know you do analytic things Thursday mornings or something like that. Do you still do those? What are kind of the topics you hit when you're in those?

KIRK FERENTZ: You check to see what other people are seeing basically and making sure that nothing is too obvious. Although there are some things like we all have tendencies, and I have a pretty good idea what the main front or fronts we're going to see this week are.

The challenge is blocking them, so the better your team is, the more predictable you can become. But you're just looking, making routine checks to see what things look like from the other people looking across the ball at you.

Q. So basically hey, if you throw the ball -- if it's 3rd and 5 or beyond you throw the ball 95 percent of the time, that's the kind of --

KIRK FERENTZ: It is, but I would say this, too. We do the same thing on the opponents that we play, and I look at those numbers, and predictably, 3rd and longer the pass numbers -- same thing with personnel groups, too.

Most people are fairly consistent with what they do. Not just like one opponent, but week to week to week, situations really dictate a lot of times.

Now, that being said, some teams on 1st down may be 70 percent run and the next team might be 30 percent run if you're playing Mississippi State. You have those things, too. But usually teams are fairly consistent to their personality.

Q. How do you get a team to grow faster?

KIRK FERENTZ: I wish I knew. We run that race each and every year. Again, that's college football and the NFL, too, has become a little bit like college in some ways because when free agency opened up, the days of the old Redskins or the old Steelers or the old Dolphins or the Dallas Cowboys -- teams' rosters change.

Every year is a new year. You've got new chemistry, younger players, new younger players playing in the NFL, and that's always been that way in college football, although I would suggest or argue that in the last couple years we're kind of leaning even more to younger guys with more -- you've got more guys coming out early and you've got more players coming in early, so everything is kind of moved over a little bit. So I think you see more younger players on the field, and it's just how well can they utilize the practice snaps they get, how smart and how attentive can they be in meetings because that's another way to grow and learn. So it's a race you run every year. It's not like anybody has got a great head start on it.

Q. You've mentioned that you've liked the way the offensive line is trending. I'm just wondering, how would you assess the past couple of weeks specifically in their growth and what kind of gives you confidence in the offensive line's trajectory going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just one quick example, and I mentioned the nice thing about the replay board. We had a couple good runs to our right, and one of our younger guys in there reacted to something that was the way they were playing that run, the defense was, and I'll promise you, three weeks ago he never would have seen it. So that gave me encouragement. Little things like that, just little intricacies that take some time and take some preparation and study, all those kinds of things.

But you can have a great week during the week, show them on tape, hey, this may happen; you're going to have to do this if it does happen, and you get out there on Saturday, and it's like huh? Just straight down the tracks, train tracks.

That shows you a guy's mind is working and he's taking coaching and really paying attention and starting to see more, and that to your question, Steve, is like that experience is this versus this. That's being able to see a little bit more than what's straight in front of you, but younger players tend to be kind of looking down a hallway instead of having a bigger picture.

Q. Brian told a story about when he was a player basically during freshman year he was getting his butt kicked in conditioning, and Bret Bielema who was an assistant at the time put his arm around him and said something

along the lines of, you're doing all right, kid, and he said as an 18-year-old I really needed to hear that. Does that story sound familiar to you? If Brian hasn't told you specifically about that, does that sound like something Bielema would do?

KIRK FERENTZ: It is, yeah. Hopefully good coaches do that with each other and then with players certainly, most importantly with players.

Guys need encouragement. Everybody needs encouragement, and I think it's always helpful, too, when it comes from a different position. If it's your positional player -- it's kind of like raising your own kids. When they hear your voice, half the time they don't listen to it, but I think it can be really more impactful when a different position coach compliments a player, and when it's across the ball it's even better.

But we all need that. We all need some encouragement, especially when things are a little bit bumpy.

Q. Illinois made a change with Bielema a year ago, now you see your other border states making changes here, Nebraska, Wisconsin. Does that give you -- how do you feel in your position seeing all this change around you compared to obviously you're the picture of stability here?

KIRK FERENTZ: You're working a little bit ahead of me on this one. It just dawned on me there's two border states where there's changes, and I hadn't thought about it in those terms.

You know, it's the business we're in, and we all know that. We all signed up for it. We all know that. It's just changing, that's all. In my case, yeah, when I signed up, it's way different than it was when I signed up. Not as much for maybe some of the more recent guys.

But again, it's just the world we live in, and you'd be naïve not to understand it's a part of what can happen and does happen.

I still just go back to my roots. I grew up in a place where the pro team just happened to -- hire a guy in 1969 nobody had heard of, and then they hired another guy 20 years later nobody had ever heard of, and same thing the last time they did it. So they've hired three coaches in 50 years that really nobody had heard of, and they've done really well, as well as any organization out there.

To me philosophically the challenge is more like if you're in a competitive endeavor, you understand that it's tough. It's tough to be successful, and it's tough to be at the top.

So when you're not, you focus on solutions and working through things rather than just throwing bodies out and trying again with another -- there's a million teams that have tried that over the last 50 years and not many of them have had a lot of luck getting traction.

Look at the teams right now in the NFL. My world is pretty simplistic. The best teams in the NFL have had pretty good stability for the most part. There's some exceptions to every rule, but you could name a couple organizations that have won a lot of Super Bowls, and there's pretty good continuity there.

I think you've got a better chance that way, but that's just one person's opinion.

Q. Do you have those conversations with your administration here like about the importance of patience or the importance of long-term thinking?

KIRK FERENTZ: I haven't really had to. That's one of the things I appreciate. I think I've been able to -- I've been really lucky in my career if you think about it. I've been places where people are pretty reasonable and they understand competition and they help you work through things, and to me there's only two ways to do it if you hit adversity: Just trash the thing and then start over again, or you try to work through it.

For whatever reason, it's just kind of worked out and I'm appreciative of that. I've always been appreciative of working in a good, stable environment. Don't take it for granted.

Q. In the NFL a lot of teams operate similar type blocking systems as you do. They have other wrinkles, but they're professional players so they don't have a 20-hour rule or week. How difficult is it or is it difficult at all to incorporate more changes within what you want to do foundationally based on the fact that there's limitations with the players and their time allotment to learn something like that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I would even argue -- one thing I don't miss about the NFL, their limitations are crazier than -- not that ours are crazy. I don't think ours are crazy, but they've been handcuffed. In one person's opinion, the guys that helped make the CBA, form the CBA are usually veteran guys, so it kind of favors guys that usually know what they're doing as opposed to younger guys coming up that way.

But to be a line coach right now -- a friend of mine who was contemplating going back to the NFL this off-season made a comment to me: Why would I want to go to a job where I can work with my players like five months a year, whereas when I went to the NFL I got to work with younger guys in February, March. You could do that and help bring them along and train them. So their rules have really changed dramatically.

I think the biggest thing is equal across the board. That's my biggest complaint in college football right now is the rules we abide by or the way we operate is not consistent across the board, whereas in the NFL at least all 32 teams have the same rules, so who can do the best with those, those guidelines and those restrictions or whatever the parameters may be.

Q. When you look at what you do and you look at say the 49ers or the Rams or beyond that, can you take from some of what they do and apply it to your system?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, sure.

Q. Or is it just too big and broad to be able to do that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I think you take from everybody. I don't think necessarily one system or one way of doing things is any harder than the other. It's just what you do.

But yeah, hopefully -- there's some people we can't get anything out of. We're not real common with Mississippi State. I've got great admiration for Coach Leach. We got to play against each other 20-some years ago. Great admiration for what he does; it's so unique. But for us to copy them, forget about that.

So yeah, there are some that are really just so far apart, but you can learn from everybody and steal from everybody, and we all do that.

Q. Going back to 1999, what was it about Bielema that made you decide to keep him around?

KIRK FERENTZ: I knew him as a player first of all, and then the story that was brought up about Brian as a player here I didn't know about, but I know Brian came to camp here somewhere in the nine years I was gone, and Bret looked out for him there, too. Bret had a great reputation.

He had done a good job as a young coach. It's not surprising based on what I knew of him as a player, and I'm not surprised he's done very well in his career since he's left here. He was a good coach 20-some years ago, and obviously he's done a great job each and everywhere he's been. He's done a really nice job.

He cares about people. He's a good football coach, works at it. It's not like we're rocket scientists. I promise you that. I met one, James Van Allen. We're not in that category. But he works hard at what he does and does a great job.

Q. Do you remember the note that he sent you after Brian had prospect camp here?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I do. Did he mention that?

Q. Yeah, at Big Ten Media Day.

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely, yeah.

Q. Looking at Arland, I'm sure you expected him to have a big role coming into this year, but by way of injury, he's kind of been thrust into that wide receiver role. How have you seen him handle that in all aspects? And then the second part of the question is as you're getting more receivers back, how big of a piece is he going to be in the offense to get the team to where they're wanting to go?

KIRK FERENTZ: Two things there. Arland has been great since he showed up here a year ago, a year and a half ago. He's just a delightful young guy. You've met him. He's got a great personality. He's a can-do guy. Eager to try anything and work hard. That's a great starting point. He has good ability. He's just a guy who -- you can see why his teams have won, and you can see why he won that Simone Award as a junior. I'm not surprised at all. He's an exceptional young guy.

He's done a really good job this year, and I was worried about him just getting worn out because of our lack of depth and how much work he's been doing. So I think it is all great.

Now Nico is starting to be more involved. We've got Brody out there practicing and playing now.

We're starting to get a little bit more of a -- we can spread the role a little bit, and hopefully he can get caught up here a little bit because I was worried about him just getting worn out and tired. He's doing good, and he's done a really nice job as a punt returner, too, and doesn't take that for granted, but I'm not surprised, if that makes any sense, because he just seems to do whatever he does well.

Q. I know you operate under a week-by-week basis, but what is kind of the protocol your bye week plan?

KIRK FERENTZ: It changes week to week, but it's kind of like some people map out their entire preseason. We'll do that in June. I've never done that because things change so much, and this is a great example. This year is a great example of things.

As I stand here right now, I've kind of got a mental picture of what we're going to do. I haven't put anything on paper, but I've got a mental picture.

I think probably the single most important thing right now is make sure we rest a lot of guys. We just talked about it, a guy like Arland who's done a lot of things now. This is going to be 10 weeks, I believe, right, if you add and include camp. So I think for a guy like him right now, the biggest thing is just let him catch his breath a little bit and get ready for the last six weeks.

So it's year to year, and player to player, quite frankly, so we'll figure out something that makes sense for everybody.

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