

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



Wisconsin. Our captains are Joe Evan, Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey and Cade McNamara.

Injury-wise, don't expect Jaz or Deshaun to be back this week. We'll see how that goes as we move forward.

Third road game this season and third straight road game in a tough environment. Certainly the last two, were tough environments. Camp Randall is the same way and certainly a big part of the challenge is the fact you're playing a really good football team. That's what we're looking at with Wisconsin.

They're a different team in some ways. Obviously, new coaching staff. Few new members they've added onto the team, but they've also got a lot of players that we've seen prior to good blend.

Coach Fickell has done a great job, most recently at Cincinnati. He's a tremendous football coach, great career as a player. Has done a great job at Cincinnati. Has been doing an outstanding job up there. He and his staff just hit the ground running.

We're very impressed with them in all three phases up there. And like you'd expect, they're physical. They're strong. Again, a lot of the great players they've had in the past are still on that team. And sitting here thinking about their line, their running back, outstanding players. Some good guys on defense, very active, tough guys to block and deal with.

And then if you think about their special teams, they had a really good core group of guys. Still do. And they have two new specialists that have made them that much better.

Typical Wisconsin -- they're a big, physical team, play hard and aggressively and look very good on film and credit to them there.

And just a little side bar. I know we had a couple of tight ends do really well on Sunday. Don't get to watch any NFL football but did hear about the success George and Sam both had.

It's kind of an illustration in college football that players get better if they're doing things right and have good work habits. Both of those two guys, neither of them were big

COACH FERENTZ: Good Afternoon. I'll talk a little bit about last week and then look forward to this week's game.

As I said the other day, really happy to get the win. I think with each week our team's learning and the other day we had good focus. Thought they played hard and basically fought the entire game.

Two weeks ago, it was kind of a deal where we had to rally in the fourth quarter. And we're in Big Ten play now, so it's going to be tough each and every quarter. And hopefully we'll learn and as we go along here.

So I think Saturday, defensively, they played a good game. Outside of two possessions kind of, I don't know if "let down" is the right word, but for whatever reason we just weren't just quite there. Need to do our best to eliminate that.

Good to see some pass rush success during the course of the game.

Offensively, the run game was probably the highlight. I think the line took some steps, and the tight ends, fullbacks involved in that as well.

And special teams, I want to congratulate Tory Taylor on being Big Ten Special Teams Player of the Week. And he's done a great job all season long. He's really practicing well. The punt game was good. We have some things in the field goal area to clean up. So moving forward there.

And then some recent developments that I'll share, Noah Shannon has been cleared to practice. I don't know what we'll learn or when we'll learn his status moving forward. But at least we have him on the field now. He's back on the roster and able to be part of the team as a football player instead of a guy helping out a little bit. So that's positive, and we'll keep our fingers crossed as we move forward.

Moving forward to this week, certainly, a big challenge with



recruits when they got here, but had great careers. And continuing to play at a high level.

And probably safe to say they're both improving each and every day. So that's the fun part about football, just in general. So kudos to those guys and all the guys doing well.

And the last thing our Kid Captain is Madi Ramirez, a young lady from Le Claire. As I understand it, at age 2 she was diagnosed with a pretty rare disorder. And the prognosis was not great. Happy to say she's a 17-year-old senior now. And as I understand it big personality, doing well.

And she gave me a little wristband here back on Kid Captain Day. We'll be thinking about her this weekend, and we are happy to have her as Kid Captain.

Q. With Noah, how much time will it take, obviously he's missed a lot, to get up to game speed?

COACH FERENTZ: I really don't know. We've never been in this situation. He missed a lot of time. He has a great attitude. He's been around and was working through an injury probably couldn't play physically until a couple of weeks ago. Hasn't been in pads in quite a while now.

So we'll see. But I don't know even when the decision is going to be made so at least we have ample time to get him ready, hopefully.

Q. Statistically sometimes the box scores defy logic. You guys keep winning games. How would you articulate how you're able to keep doing that over the last several years, and what your message is to the team about finding ways to win?

COACH FERENTZ: It's probably the history of our program. The exception is when it goes the other way. 2002 comes to mind. We had very few injuries in 2002 and really hit stride offensively early. That began the year before.

But this is kind of more common. Usually we have challenges to deal with in some form. But ultimately that's what the neat part about the game is. The goal is to get to the finish line and find a way to be successful and win the game.

I don't want to call 2002 too easy because some things come to mind right away. Indiana, we had to pick three off in the red zone to win that game. I don't think Indiana won a game going into that game. It was like week 9 or 10.

It's never easy. But then I think about two years later, '04, I think we were next to last in rushing the football that year and we were still Big Ten champs.

There's always challenges. It's just trying to work around challenges, I guess, is probably the way to do it. And I don't know about other places but I know that's been our story year in, year out.

Q. When you look at Wisconsin, did you have to do a double take off -- when you looked at their offense, as much as 11 personnel they run versus every other year combined the last 20 years?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. That's certainly a good switch. We got a good look at them last week watching Purdue film. It looks different from that standpoint, but what doesn't look different they still look big, physical. They run the ball really well.

When you have backs like they have, although one is injured right now, but Allen is just a tremendous football player. I think we all noticed that a couple years ago, but he's even better now.

So good starting point and the quarterback is playing really well for them too. He can run and throw. It's a dangerous attack.

But it's, again, the key ingredients of having a big veteran line. Those guys are very experienced and very proficient. And skill guys that can make some really good plays. They have a nice group of receivers too, some old and some new. So they've got a good mix here.

Q. With their receivers, Braelon Allen seems to be more of a threat in the receiving than past years. What element have you seen in his game versus past years?

COACH FERENTZ: That's probably referring to what Scott's referring to, just their style of play. He's a talented football player. And I mentioned George and Sam. I don't think he was overly recruited, and, as I understand, went more as a defensive guy but he certainly found the right place to play him.

And he's a tremendous football player. They're going to give it to him a couple different ways.

Q. After watching the film, what is your message to Deacon, maybe trying to fix some of the mistakes or trying too hard?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's probably pressing a little bit. And I can't read minds but my guess he's a very

prideful guy, and he wants to do like all of our guys do. So I think he's probably pressing a little bit.

Secondly is he hasn't played since 2020. That was three high school games, COVID shortened year. Spring season, and I guess he played -- I did hear a rumor, I asked him a little bit about it, some kind of wild card team or wildcat, a guy from here or a guy from there, one of those deals, I don't know who they played.

Point being, he hasn't played much in the last couple years. So this is kind of his maiden voyage. We may have to be a little patient. Did a lot of good things. The pick that he had was a tough play for him.

So I thought he made some good decisions, just didn't quite have the accuracy he's capable of. Hopefully that will work itself out as we move forward.

Q. He was talking about being jittery with his first game as a starter last week. Now going into a road game, a place that obviously he has a lot of history with, how do you keep him kind of steady?

COACH FERENTZ: Nothing special. Other than he wants to do better. I think he wants to get off to a better start, certainly. And hopefully he'll do that.

But no matter where we play, it's going to be the challenge is just for him to play the way he can play. And hopefully after starting this last game now he's got a little bit -- he's hardly a grizzled veteran but at least he's done it and we'll see how that goes.

Q. What's your message right now to the receivers. They didn't catch a pass the other day for the first time in this program since the '70s in a game. But they've had opportunities. They've slipped through their fingers. But also haven't been targeted a lot. What are you trying to do with the receivers and what are you trying to say to keep them engaged?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope they are engaged. I believe they are. And that stuff is all going to play out the way it plays out. Saturday the way the game developed, we were playing in a way that we felt gave us our best chance to win in that particular ball game.

You never know how it's going to unfold or what it's going to look like. And we were having pretty good luck with the running game at that point. It's the way it worked out.

We're not going to change our overall philosophy a lot. And everybody's got a role, a chance, an opportunity. And hopefully when it comes their way they'll be able to execute

the way we think they can. They're good players. They'll bounce back.

Q. Speaking of wide receivers, Kaleb Brown, are you able to elaborate on his situation? Is he available for this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it was a personal matter. He's back at practice yesterday and has had two good days.

Q. Would you describe his absence as disciplinary in any way?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I would say it was a personal matter.

Q. What's the magnitude of this game? Who knows, maybe this could be what determines who wins this division. I know it's just one of 12, but just overall, Iowa, Wisconsin, what's the magnitude of that?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a rivalry game. We have a trophy. I do know that. I'm losing track of the rivalries thing.

I know this, it's a border game when I got here in '81, it was a big game back then. It's always been that way. It's been a pretty good series overall, time, history, at least my 34 years involved in it. So that part's good.

It's a big game. We both have one loss now. They have a good team. We're trying to become a good team. To worry about anything besides that, it's a conference game. Conference games are different than non-league games. They all count in the end. But conference games are important.

It's about where it's at, and any worry about rankings and pennant races, all that stuff, that in my mind comes in November. Right now we're just trying to move forward here and see if we can find a way to win.

Q. When you look at the West Division, this is the tenth and final year of it --

COACH FERENTZ: Are you including Legends and Leaders? Does that count as the 10 or outside the 10?

Q. That was three before that than.

COACH FERENTZ: Is it really? All right. Kind of lost track.

Q. But the West Division, what are your thoughts, this being the last year for it. It seemed to work out really well for Iowa where every team but one is on your

border. You kind of share similar resources and shared histories. What's kind of been your thought playing in this division for 10 years?

COACH FERENTZ: It's been great. Just all those things you described probably means it's outdated because, as we know, we've moved past all that I think in college football. That's kind of what was to me the message a year ago when we expanded to 16, right? That made it 16.

Even going back to the '13, '14, we kind of broke away from that mold or model. We're living a little bit in the past having border teams and all that kind of stuff.

But we're moving into a new phase with college football. So it kind of is what it is. And we'll make adjustments as we go forward here next year.

Q. When you look at the running game, obviously being a catalyst in the past game, how can that help in not having to rely so much on that big arm?

COACH FERENTZ: In a perfect world you want to be balanced. At least that's our goal is to try to have the threat to run and pass. And sometimes your opponent dictates how it's going to go, either going into a game or during the game.

And pretty much anybody can take something away if they're committed to it. And hopefully it opens up something else. But in a perfect world, we'd like to be balanced. We've certainly been going through some adjustments and trying to get settled and acclimated with our personnel.

And so hopefully as we move forward here the second half of the season we can be a little bit more settled and just kind of get some consistency and figure out what works best for us.

And Saturday happened to be running game was going a little bit, but each and every week can be a little different. Hopefully we'll have flexibility enough to be able to adjust and be successful.

Q. From an injury standpoint what's the latest with DeJong and Ostrenga?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they both have a chance, but we'll let the week play out see what it looks like.

Q. With Deacon, I feel like with the guys can go two ways. One is the guy you can joke around with. And the other way is they can give you genuine thoughts about going back to his old stomping grounds. Have

you seen either of those from Deacon's teammates?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. I'm not with those guys all the time, obviously. But he seems like he does every week. Seems focused on trying to get the game plan down and doing what he can do.

To that point, I haven't given a lot of great thought. He played there, but it wasn't like he played a lot. In fact, he didn't play at all as far as I know. I don't know that there's some kind of sentimental or emotional deal going on. I don't think so. I think he's just happy to be here and not that he's not happy to be there, but he's happy to be here and he's looking forward.

Q. You look at that touchdown run by Kaleb Johnson, I think it was a zone type of run, but you look at the way that your line blocked on that, and it seemed to be almost perfect. You got vertical when you needed to. You got the seal out in different pairings. Is that what you're talking about when you say you see this line maturing? Is that kind of the fruit of that?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. I think Saturday is probably our best day out there. And saw some good things.

In that particular play, the way they played helped us, too, because of their coverage. They didn't have a safety back there. We were able to catch them and the line creased it really well. He hit and there was nobody out there. Instead of a 20-yard play, now you're going through the end zone; it would have been 100 if we had 100-yard field.

That's the way they play. It's a unique. I doubt we'll get that this week.

Q. Cooper DeJean seems to keep making plays, a 70-yard punt return last week, his 40-something yards on the interception return. Do you attribute that to instincts?

COACH FERENTZ: He's just a rare player. It's hard to think of many guys in 25 years that can do things like he does and he does them pretty consistently.

It's like I said with Sam and George, probably one of the neat things about his story, somebody pointed out this year we traveled to Iowa State that he wasn't on the traveling team two years ago to Iowa State.

I think he played the last five games. He rose up later on. It wasn't like he was killing it early in the season or in preseason. But as the season went on, this guy is pretty good let's get him in there. And it just continues to snowball if you will.

And he's a really good player. But he didn't walk in here like there's Cooper DeJean. We thought he was pretty good; don't get me wrong. But I don't think anybody's writing about him when he came here.

That's really not important. What you do when you get somewhere is what counts, and he keeps getting better. But he's a very talented player, yes.

Q. When you look at the NFL, Iowa has the moniker of tight end U, you've got more catches, for starters. They're all completely different but they are equally effective in their different ways. What is the underlying element that all of them, the starters have had, and even some in recent years before them, what is their common element that's helped allow them to be successful?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's true of a lot of our guys that have gone on and done well. We've had linemen, they don't work the same size-wise, but to your point where you're talking about the tight ends, they're all very different type tight ends -- at least in my mind. They all have great pride and great competitiveness, they're good athletes. But they play within their skill set. But I think the common denominator with all the great players we've had through here, just take tremendous pride in their performance. So as a result of that, they work on things the right way and they just really dedicate themselves. They don't just rely on what abilities they have.

Having ability is one thing, but to really put it to use and maximize it, that's when you're in business, and I think that's fair to say about all the guys you referenced. It's a common denominator.

Q. Looking at TJ, I think was the 66th run tight end. George the 200th wide receiver, two star. Fant had options to go defensive end, and Sam I think Bowling Green was his only offer. Yet here they are. They come in and they each took different paths to the field. Does it surprise you at all to see where they've ended up?

COACH FERENTZ: Not once you get to work with them. If we were smarter, we would have known that while we were recruiting them. But a lot of guys we've recruited we've recruited late or nobody else was recruiting them. Cooper DeJean.

But, again, the common denominator is what they do when they get there and all we do is provide the opportunity and hopefully good resources for them. They're still the guys doing the work. And that's true of each and every one of

those guys. And they've all been coachable, too. They want to get better and they're eager to get better, strength and conditioning, football part, paying attention to nutrition, all the things that go into making a guy a really good football player. They're hungry to learn and then hungry to try to exercise what they can to get better.

Q. Over the years, there's been a lot of players that have said their ability to save film and critique themselves have helped elevate their game. If you're Deacon Hill, younger guy, it can be tough to not tunnel in on the positives or negatives. How do you teach your players to just stay level-headed when it comes to evaluating tape and how important is that?

COACH FERENTZ: You have to. Kind of two components there. The understanding the value of tape and really appreciating the value of tape is really critical. It's important, opponent study. There's a lot of answers on the tape if you'll put the time in. And the second part is usually older guys are better at that.

And I've always kind of encouraged players I've worked with to study themselves. Study great players and what can you take over but study yourself because you gotta know what your weaknesses are to fix them typically and they show up on tape, too.

So if you really want in on that, at least it gives you a chance to move forward. That's what we're trying to do with every guy every team is to get them to step forward, find a way to move forward. There's always challenges. Always challenges.

Opponent study is important, but I think really being honest about what you're doing, too, is maybe equally as important as far as if you want to move forward.

Q. Kaleb Johnson came back last game after missing a few games. Is he feeling back to 100 percent after Saturday's game?

COACH FERENTZ: As far as I know, yes. He seems fine. He was great at practice. I think he's doing well.

Q. How special was it for you guys to play Utah State now and then to parlay some of those same experiences down to Wisconsin, quick passing game?

COACH FERENTZ: I think you learn from everybody and every experience. So when you play a tempo team, last week those guys were moving pretty good -- it's not exactly the same. But it doesn't hurt, those kinds of experiences don't hurt. Same thing when you play a team with similar defensive philosophies, especially if they're a little bit

different from what -- although it's kind of dumb to say that in college football because it's like every week is almost different, a lot of different menus, if you will.

Pro football is a little bit more standardized. I guess styles of play in college are kind of like starting times in college. Who knows. You know it could be 11, 2:30 or 3:00, 6:30 or 7 p.m.

Q. What were your first impressions of Logan Lee when he got here, how has he impacted the team?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, we really liked him in recruiting. There's not much not to like there. Excellent wrestler, good football player. We knew about him early. He was young. He came over here, he and his coach and coach's son, coach's son is now a young man. We got a good start there. Knew a lot about his family.

Just everything about him, we really liked the guy. He was a mature kid in high school. He's obviously that way now.

And I think probably the biggest story for him he had some injuries, especially early in his career, that slowed him down. He was a try-hard guy, good effort guy, but a good player but maybe not playing as fast as you like. That's just experience and working on it on a routine basis. He's been healthy now the last couple of years.

You'd see him getting better with each game out there because he's more comfortable and more instinctive, if you will, and now he's playing really well for us and a great leader on top of it.

Q. We're less than a week from Coach Bluder and the gang over at the stadium for Crossover. I know you're focused in on football. Do you have any plans to watch that on Sunday?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's awesome. Hopefully the weather is good for them. I know the wrestling guys did it a couple of years ago. It's awesome.

What a great idea. I don't know who thought of it but a great idea. I'm sure it will be well received.

Q. The rush defense is still only about ninth in the Big Ten so far this year. You've seen it be great under you pretty frequently. How do you bring that level performance back up to the high level performance?

COACH FERENTZ: It's like the pass rush that was an issue in Tulsa Saturday. It may be again next week. We'll keep working. We just keep doing what we do, keep working away. And it's not that we're not aware of stats.

We're too cognizant.

But all you're trying to do is assess your team, figure out what we can do, can't do, and where the work needs to be directed a little bit. But overall, it's not like there's a specific drill for that.

Going back to the earlier question, somehow, some way really what the game's about is trying to figure out to be successful on the scoreboard. That's first and foremost. The other stuff over the course of the season probably works out to what it should and obviously you'd rather be top five, top three, top two in every category, but it's probably not realistic, and again in our program that's probably not going to be the case.

But finding a way to be successful is what is important. So if we can keep them off the scoreboard enough and get on the scoreboard enough, then, to me, that's a pretty good deal as long as you can do it enough. That's the challenge. There's a lot of different ways to be successful and win.

We're just trying to maximize every area and, boy, if every game could be 40-0 that would be great. But I can't remember a year like that. We'll just try to keep seeing if we can find a way to get to the finish line.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports