

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just great to have Bryan and his family back. I'll talk about that in a second.

But good afternoon. Appreciate everybody being here. Certainly is a good weekend. And I want to congratulate Coach Bulder and the women's basketball team. Sounds like it was a great event over there for the Crossover at Kinnick.

What a fantastic concept. We could see from the windows, we were up here getting our stuff cleaned up, and just a lot of activity outside. It was neat to see that. Sounds like it went well.

Great experience for everybody involved and certainly the children's hospital benefits from it. That's an even bigger bonus there. Really nice activity on Sunday.

And certainly a good weekend for us. Happy about the victory. It was hard fought. Made the ride home a lot easier Saturday night. Proud of our football team in that regard.

Want to congratulate Tory Taylor, second straight week Big Ten Special Teams Player of the Week. Obviously, he's having a great senior year. He was a huge difference in the game the other night, a big impact on the game. And has just done a great job all season long. And also does a great job holding for Drew on the field goals. Those two things played a big factor in the outcome of the game the other day.

Happy about the performance, as I said the other night. The team was certainly determined. They fought, competed hard out there. Staff had a great plan and then adjusted as the game went on, couple of circumstances there.

All in all it was a good outing for us. Typical Big Ten game. Hard-fought, physical, highly contested all three phases. And I think that's certainly the message as we move forward now playing another rivalry game, Big Ten team, who is also big, physical and does a great job. Have our

work cut out again. Same messaging it was a week ago for us.

Moving on to this week, captains this week are the same four guys: Joe Evans, Jay Higgins, Luke Lachey and Cade McNamara.

On a sad note, unfortunately Erick All, looks like his season is over. We were worried about that on Saturday. And tests confirmed that. He's going to miss the rest of the year. Really unfortunate. He's done a great job, newcomer to the team, a great addition.

Such a positive guy, hardworking, great personality and loves the game. Loves everything about the game, not just the game itself. And I hate to lose anybody, and certainly feel badly for Erick in that regard. He was certainly adding a lot to our football team. It's a tough deal. We'll all support him in his recovery, his road back, and certainly hope all goes well.

Turning the page to Minnesota, as I alluded to, it's a real challenge for us. A really good football team and traditionally our games have been really hard-fought. Coach Fleck has done a great job building a very successful, stable program. They certainly have an identity, and good teams do. That's what you look at when you look across the field.

They continue to be a big physical group offensively. Names change but the pattern stays pretty similar. They run the ball extremely well. Ran the ball really well against us last year, as good as anybody has in a long time. That's certainly something we'll have to be focused on.

There are a lot of good defensive teams in our conference. And the last several years, Minnesota's added to that. They've been extremely tough to move the ball against and score against. They do a good job there. And they're good on special teams on top of that, like you'd expect.

That's what they look like. They're coming off the bye. I'm sure they'll be well prepared and well rested. Long story short, just another tough challenge. It will be great to be in Kinnick, certainly, but we'll have to do our work on that one.

Our Kid Captain is Bentley Erickson, a 12-year-old from Brainard, Minnesota. When it comes to the kids hospital,

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there really is no boundaries on that. Everybody is supportive.

Bentley was born at 31 weeks. He was moved down to the Stead hospital five days into his life. And in his lifetime has experienced 20 surgeries.

Now as I've been told, is a healthy, vibrant 12-year-old Xbox expert. Sounds like he and George Kittle have a little something going right now too. So I think George has a pretty good fan club and it's growing weekly.

It will be great to have Bentley here with his family. And just looking forward to having him in Kinnick certainly.

Last but not least, we want to welcome Bryan and congratulate him. He and his wife Abbie are here and their two children. His family will be coming into town later this week.

I know it's a special occasion, and I just the ANF relationship has been absolutely fantastic for us now, coming up on 30 years, I guess. Just a great relationship. Coach Fry's idea on the onset.

But talking about Bryan a little bit, he was such a great addition to our program, when he decided to come here. I remember in the recruitment we kind of took a shot and told him glad to have him as a tight end and as a defensive player. I remember having a conversation really with him, just said thought his future might be on the offensive line. I don't know if that's smart or not because most kids run like hell when you say something like that.

He kind of gravitated towards that. I don't know if that made the difference in recruiting. But fortunately he came here. Had success rate off the bat. We didn't start him in our first game. We were in Soldier Field actually back in his hometown. We were going to play him the next week and he hurt his shoulder.

One thing I remember about him in his first year he was out a couple weeks but when he came back he picked up a stunt in a Tuesday practice -- I can tell you exactly where I was standing; I remember it so vividly -- and he made the pick-up. And it impressed me so much for a guy who has not only been out for three weeks but is a first-year player.

And taught me, like, this guy was wired in. He was paying attention even though he wasn't out there practicing like this guy -- either that or he's really lucky. History proved that he was paying attention because that's just how he operated. Had good physical skills but had the mindset. That's hard for a first-year guy to come in here play in this conference and play well. And he did it right off the bat.

Had a great career with us.

And obviously went on, had a great pro career with Green Bay and finished up with the Chargers.

But the other thing I would add to it, if you look at some of the guys that Ted Thompson picked up there in Green Bay during his tenure up there -- you think about Aaron Kampman, Matt Bowen and most recently take Mike Daniels or Micah Hyde, and Bryan was in between there.

It's kind of like Bill Polian with the Colts, just certain teams seem to be wired into our guys and really had a good feel for them. And Bryan is a good example of that. He played for us as a freshman. And his rookie year ends up getting a Super Bowl ring. Started, I think, 10 games -- right tackle and in the huddle there with Aaron Rodgers. And a big part of the reason they were world champion.

Had an outstanding career here. Even more illustrious career as an NFL player, and most importantly just an outstanding person.

When you look at that wall and the recipients that have gone into the Iowa Farm Bureau Hall of Fame it's really impressive. Bryan certainly belongs there. So congratulations, Bryan, you and your family.

Q. Yahya Black had a sling after the game. Can we get an update on his status? And Ostrenga and Patterson, where are they right now in their recovery?

COACH FERENTZ: So Patterson, I think, is going to be okay. He's practicing. Looks like he's okay. So, Jaz hopefully will hopefully join us.

Addi practiced today, partial practice. Optimistic but we'll have to see how the week goes. Yahya, we'll wait and see.

Q. With Erick, I'm assuming it will need surgery. What's his recovery timeline for that?

COACH FERENTZ: It takes a while. Whatever, six, eight, 10 months, somewhere. It's significant and unfortunate.

Q. Are you guys holding out hope that maybe Lachey comes back at some point, maybe bowl game or something like that?

COACH FERENTZ: I talked to him yesterday about being back after the bye -- jokingly. He just smiled.

But we'll see. You can't count on it. It's hard to predict. The window's open for that, maybe, sometime in

December. But it's certainly not for sure.

Q. What about Noah Shannon's situation now? Any additional feedback?

COACH FERENTZ: He looks good in pads and he practices well. That hasn't changed. He's got fresh legs, too. But we're just waiting on the NCAA. Hopefully they'll do the right thing. How soon that's going to be, if it's one call, two calls, I don't know.

It's okay. Time's ticking. He's getting older. All of us are getting older. Hopefully it's sooner than later they make a decision.

I say it jokingly; it's really not funny at all. We'll see. I don't know. I don't have a firm date on what's going to happen or when.

Q. You think a realistic timeline for his return being the Wrigley Field game, maybe the ballpark, unless they tell you tomorrow?

COACH FERENTZ: If they call tomorrow, that would be great. To me they probably could have done it in June. That's my, looking at this whole thing. But that's discussion for a different day, too.

If they wanted to call tomorrow, it would be outstanding. We'll have them out there Saturday if they do. I don't think that's going to happen. I don't know when it's going to happen.

Q. If Black can't go, you have Logan and Aaron Graves at D tackle. What's your next option? We've seen Pittman a little.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's the next guy, yes.

Q. Craig potentially?

COACH FERENTZ: Deontae Craig's played there in the past. We're nicked up a little bit. We've played seven games and got a lot of guys that are playing with soreness and pain. That's part of the game unfortunately, like, guys getting hurt.

I don't say it in a callous way. It's just the reality of what we do. We'll figure it out. We'll get 60 more minutes to play here and then we'll regroup next week.

Q. You are banged up. I know every team is, I understand that. But you've got one game before the bye. And you're coming off an emotional win. What's the message to the team here trying to limp to the

finish line?

COACH FERENTZ: A while back I just talked to the guys about an eight-week season. That's really what it is. I don't know about anybody else, but I wasn't smart enough to know eight weeks ago what it was going to look like today, or seven weeks ago, I guess.

You just take it a week at a time. Try to take it a day at a time, assess where you're at. It's all about survival. That's what Saturday was about. That's what this week will be about.

Very similar type game. And we are coming off an emotional win. But they're pretty much the same story each and every week. That's part of the challenge that's built in -- can you get up, get back working on Sunday and transition into the next game the next week?

You're always going to have challenges. We'll always have guys that are achy or painful or a little tired, all that kind of stuff. We just try to be as proactive as we can about recovery, rest, all those things that we all know we're supposed to do. Sometimes, we don't do, especially if you're in college.

And try to get every edge you can so you can be at your best on Saturday. That's what we're trying to do right now. Next week is next week with the late bye. We'll handle it appropriately and what have you.

But our focus has been on finishing this eight-week block. That's where it is right now.

Q. What did you think of the physicality of the run game, the offensive line against Wisconsin and sort of how they've grown this season?

COACH FERENTZ: I think I've been saying that. I think we've seen improvement, all of us have, the last four or five weeks, I guess, and -- three weeks, maybe, I guess, whenever we started the second four-game deal.

It shows up in different ways, but we're getting a little bit more mature. Now we're operating a little bit better together and having a better feel. Certainly the run game was huge for us the other night. We'll be a better football team if we can run the ball successfully. It's never easy, but it certainly helps you.

Hopefully guys are gaining confidence. When good things do happen they should feel a little bit more confident. The backs, especially Leshon, really ran the ball well and we created some room for him. He did something with it.

Even the long run that wasn't a clean play. There was some bobbing and weaving going on there. But that's the way the run game is and you've got to make something happen. If you're a back there's typically going to be somebody that you'll have to put a move on or break a tackle or whatever. And that's the way, the nature of the game. It's encouraging.

Q. What's the status of Deshaun Lee and TJ Hall?

COACH FERENTZ: Hall is not going to make it this week. Deshaun, we'll see, it's day by day.

Q. Brenden Deasfernandes and Deavin Hilson, what's your level of confidence in them and the potential of them stepping in and playing?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, I'd be more confident if they started 20 games in their career -- I'm flashing back now -- I think we started two freshmen corners, whatever it was, up in Minneapolis, they had two good receivers, Moss and Brents. I didn't sleep so well that Friday night but those guys did great and we won the game.

That's an opportunity for the guys that haven't played a lot. We talk to them all the time. And both Brenden and Deavin are doing a good on special teams. That's reassuring to see guys out contributing to the team, doing well. Deavin had a penalty the other night. That to me was inexperience.

You get mad a little bit because we couldn't afford an inch the other night. But at the same time all of us have been watching him improve and progress as a young guy who is aggressive. So he's improved as a football player.

That penalty, it's a learning experience the other night. But I think he made some good plays for us, too. And so hopefully at some point that's going to transition into the defensive play. That's been the history of guys around here.

I'd be fine if our starters got to play the whole game. That would be okay with me.

Q. With the tight end injuries adding up, what did you see from Steven Stilianos the last month?

COACH FERENTZ: The same thing. I thought he was one of the most improved guys last spring. Technically we're playing a 4, 5 and 6 at tight end the other night, the three guys that were out there. You're probably not going to sleep well knowing that was the case going into the game. But those guys all played.

He did a good job. Johnny did a nice job. Ortwerth is in the Army now. As of the last Saturday he's in there playing. Thought he did a good job for first time out there.

It's because they practice well. Talking about Steve, we said that in the spring, I thought he was probably one of our more improved guys on the team. Last year was a transition year for him. And in the spring you could see him operating, like, this is a guy who can help us play and help us be successful. And he's going to be called upon to do more now as we move forward.

Q. Going off that, any thought to move Hayden Large back out to tight end or do you like him at fullback?

COACH FERENTZ: He has that flexibility. We're out of guys, so he'll definitely get work there. He's probably one of the four guys getting work. He's a smart guy so he can do both.

But they're not like the three guys that were playing, I guess that's kind of the difference right now. We're playing catch-up in that regard.

To your point, he played fullback more the other night. We ended up using that personnel group a little bit more than we probably anticipated. I thought he did a really nice job -- that was his first extensive playing out there. Really pleased with what we saw. It's encouraging.

Q. You sit at 6-1. We don't need to spout off all the stats, the difference between special teams, defense and offense. But talking to some of the offensive players and talking to the team, taking a look at the season, it really feels like there's a strong sense of leadership in this group that's allowed the locker room to be so united. You just wouldn't be able to guess what the stats are. But what can you say about the leadership of this group, especially coming off the Penn State game? Joe Evans said that he loved the body language in the locker room after the game because he knew that the group was ready to fight back.

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, we did it last year. Things were probably a little bit more dire. Although, it felt pretty bad four weeks ago, I don't mind telling you -- there's just no way to sugarcoat a game like that. It's not fun to go through it, as I said back then. And you try like hell to avoid those moving forward.

But it's what the game's all about. It's responding. And our players are smart. They know what's going on. They know what our challenges are. They know what things looked like in August, what they look like now.

But as much as everybody wants to predict the future, you just can't do that. You never know how seasons are going to go, what turns are going to be taken, who is going to be in, who is going to be out.

And if you have a true team, guys just work with the circumstances and situation, and they stay together. And, hey, if this path is not going to work, let's try this one, try that one.

There's a lot of ways to win football games. That's been the theme for 20-some years. We're just trying to find a way to win. That's really what the game's about. If you can come out victorious on Saturday and do it over and over you can feel good about things.

So there's no way to predict how -- it's going to be great if, hey, we'll do this, we'll do that, this and that. And we weren't counting on these guys running the ball for 300 last year, I promise you that. It made for a long day. It was hard, really hard when that's going on.

Q. You had a concerted effort to make sure the team does everything together, and obviously the swarm since 1979. The coach lets the players lead the team onto the field. Can you remind me, why is that and why is that so important to do things as a unit?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, two of the best traditions you'll see in Kinnick Stadium in my opinion, or if we go on the road, which we can't take the wave on the road, but both those are, to me, as good as it gets.

That was Coach Fry's baby all the way. I thought it made so much sense. I know our opponents made fun of us, at least they did in the '70s -- or '80s. I don't know if they do anymore.

But just what it stood for, what it meant. That was how he built the program here.

As long as I'm here, that's going to continue. And it is important. We swarmed really poorly in '04 down in Tempe, Arizona, and it's funny how things work. It's about how we played, too. We couldn't even swarm right. Couldn't take a team picture in 1999. Went back and redid that on a Saturday night during camp.

It's funny little things sometimes really carry over to bigger things. But it's just a great tradition. I'm not taking any credit for that and I'm not taking credit for the wave at all we just get to participate in it.

Both of them stand for something that I think is really neat

and all of us can be proud of that for sure.

Q. I know in some seasons like this you throw some of the stats out and not ignore them, but 27 of 70 for your quarterback probably a tough one to digest. How do you get a higher completion percentage for Deacon?

COACH FERENTZ: Throw it more accurately and catch it better, and protect better. Those are the things. I'm not even aware of those stats, quite frankly. I know this. We didn't turn it over the other night, I know that. He had something to do with that.

So you just take it as it is. And we're just trying to focus on his improvement, too. A little bit better tempo, this that. Footwork, whatever it may be.

And but first things first. Don't get us in trouble. Don't make bad decisions. Don't press. All the things that you lose games real quickly if you start doing some things. So taking care of that. And just the offensive stuff it will come when it comes and we're working at it just as we would in a good statistical year.

And it's not like your approach really changes a hell of a lot. It's just a matter of everything working together, I guess, that's my experience in football, at least.

Q. How far would you say that Joe Labas, who did start a bowl game, did win that game, didn't have a turnover that day. How far would you say the separation is between those two?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know that I want to put gauge on it. Game action determines everything, eventually. I'll say this, I know that discussion floated out there last year.

I hate to say this in a negative way, but I think we all saw, when Petras got knocked out, we saw maybe why we were playing Petras, and went through that discussion last year. Petras was our quarterback in '20. Looked pretty good with him playing back there. Offense is a team thing, takes a lot to go together to make it work. And defense is the same way. A lot of intricate things that work together and don't work together. A delicate thing. A lot of factors go into it. Right now it's clear we have a 1, 2 and a 3.

Q. What have you seen from Castro the past year?

COACH FERENTZ: I mentioned it the other night. I mean, the good things in football, just not showing from the other night, Drew Stevens coming back from a not-so-good game, two, ten days ago, whatever it is now, coming back and playing great Saturday.

I think about that, think about Leshon in the Michigan State game and he came back in that game. In his defense, fourth quarter, he really played and helped us win the game. And then certainly really helped the other night.

So guys getting off the mat. That's one story. And then Sebastian's case, in our program historically, mentioned Bryan playing as a freshman, wasn't the case for Sebastian, but he played special teams in his career. Just wasn't clicking for him defensively. Then last year, at the end of last year is when it started clicking. He's played well all season long, was huge the other night.

So it's fun to watch players because you don't know if it's going to be the fourth year or fifth year or third year, first year, you just never know when a guy is going to start to have success and sometimes it never really comes the way you would hope. But the common denominator is this guy is working hard, giving all they can give.

And Sebastian is a tough-minded guy. Boy, he's physical and tough out there on the field. Just now he's getting confidence. Really starting to feel good about what he's doing.

I'm not going to say it's his best play, but just the fact that he hit the ground after -- you got the game winner and a selfish guy would have tried to score or whatever. But he had that wherewithal to hit the ground, game over, we're going home. Start the bus and here we go.

I think it says a lot about him, too, it really does. I'm not sure he would have done that three years ago. But that's maturity and that's really getting it and understanding what it takes.

Q. Leshon is listed as the starting running back this week --

COACH FERENTZ: It had something to do with the 82-yard run or whatever it was. That was a big play for us. He ran the ball extremely well. We got faith in all of our guys, including the two young guys. They may be in there Saturday too. You never know. The way this year's going.

Anyway, I don't think we're going to call Sam Brownlee back, but he sees an opportunity and went with it. That's good for him. Might be the week before Kaleb was the guy who was being anointed.

These guys are all going to have to help us play. We'll have to run the ball if we're going to win. No question about that.

Q. You brought up '04, you brought up Sam Brownlee

just now. Does this year kind of in some ways, with all the injuries, remind you of '04?

COACH FERENTZ: In some ways. But it's different, too. But the commonality it's, like, that's football. I know I got trouble in saying that in '14 but it is football. You just don't know. You can't predict it. That's why I'm so amused with these programs in the summer. And it's an industry -- guys have jobs, that's great. I'm all for the economy.

But, like, you can't predict the future. You just can't predict it. Just don't know what's going to happen. So the bottom line is you better be flexible. You better find a way, when something does happen. It kind of goes back to the point about the team has to understand that, they've got to understand that there are different things that happen that affect or impact the way the game might go.

It's just a lot of compensation for a little bit of a week over here, this department, that department, this department better step it up a little bit until we get caught up in the other area. That's the fun part. Because these guys do get it. They care about each other and they understand there's some give and take with everything that we do. So it's all good.

Q. Rivalry aspects aside, these two teams that you play, have played forever, for 100 years, they're so physical and they take a real toll on you and you on them as well. Was that ever -- the schedule is the scheduled, but when you look at it the first time went, oh, boy, that's going to be tough to play anybody let alone Minnesota right after Wisconsin.

COACH FERENTZ: Overall, I'm not a big one on analyzing schedules because, first of all, we have nothing to do with them other than the nonleague games. And then you play what you play. It's laid out there. And it's luck of the draw and all that kind of stuff.

I'm happy our bye week is eight. I'd rather have it eight than four. I think that's a good thing.

But just again, it gets back to our league. That's the way our league is. So chances are you're going to be playing some teams week to week to week. The Michigan State was a physical game, too. Those guys came in here, played hard, I think our guys played hard. You've just got to deal with it. I think where you have to adjust is what you're doing, mentioned trying to educate the players about the value of what they do in their personal lives and we have to be responsible too as coaches and make sure we're practicing in a that gives our guys a chance to be back where they can play at their top level here Saturday.

If we had four straight more after that that's our job to try to control that but again you've got to keep educating the players that they've got some ownership in it as well.

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