

University of Iowa Football Media Conference
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Coach Kirk Ferentz Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Appreciate everybody joining us. Thanks for your work.

I'll take a minute to look back a little bit at the Purdue game and certainly look forward to the Northwestern contest this weekend. Coming home Saturday, it was a quiet ride certainly. I think everybody was disappointed and a little frustrated about the way the game turned out. Our guys played with good effort, but the bottom line is we didn't play well enough to expect to win, certainly in a conference game. I think that was evident out there.

We continue to practice the 24-hour rule, so on Sunday we come in and look at the film, you see the good things that you did but also most importantly you try to learn from the bad things, the things that didn't go right and the things that need to be addressed and improved upon, so that's a goal of Sunday.

And then the other goal is to move on. Once we put the film to bed, once we get done talking about it, then we want to move on.

It's hard to do on Sunday certainly, but I think that becomes a little bit easier on Monday morning when we hit the field, we're back with the players and get a chance to really start looking forward to the next opportunity, the next ballgame.

Certainly every loss hurts, and every loss is significant, and especially when you're playing a nine-game season. They become that much more significant. That'll never change.

I thought our special teams did a lot of good things. It was the first appearance for Tory, who did a good job for never being in a college football game before, so it was a good start for him. I thought overall our special teams were good. The one area we didn't do much in and need to shore up quickly is our kickoff return.

Offensively, we had yards but not have points to win the game.

The big story is our ball security issues on Saturday. We had three balls on the ground, lost two of them. We were penalized a lot as a football team and a lot of those were offensive penalties, and the bottom line there is when you do that it's hard to have any kind of momentum, any kind of rhythm offensively when you have negative yardage plays or plays that take you out of scoring position.

The turnovers were both opportunity killers for us, so those opportunities were left out on the field. We're not going to win in our conference doing those kinds of things.

We had a lot of first-time players, but for the quarterback position I thought he did a lot of good things, a lot of things he'll get better at, but what I was really impressed with his poise and his control out there and thought he did some good things.

And then defensively same thing; we had some good moments. But also a lot of things to clean up there, too, and probably the two biggest things that hurt us, too many missed tackles but them also running the ball effectively, especially in the second half. I think that impacted the game to a significant point.

The bottom line is we have to play cleaner football, and if we don't do that, we're not going to have a chance to be successful, and if we do do that, we give ourselves an opportunity maybe to be a little bit more successful and a little bit more turned out.

As we move forward , our captains will be the same five guys as last week: Chauncey Golston, Nick Neimann, Tyler Linderbaum, Mekhi Sargent, and Keith Duncan.

Medically, two guys from the two deep that won't be with us again are Jack Campbell and Austin Schulte; those guys won't be here this week, and probably another week at least before they're back in action.

Northwestern clearly got off to a really impressive start. They played pretty almost flawless football and looked really impressive on the tape in all three areas. Not a huge surprise. I thought they were really sharp. They played clean football and really had it rolling pretty good out there. They've done a great job over the years ever since Pat Fitzgerald took over the program. He's done a tremendous job and he's an outstanding staff.

When you walk the film you almost know what to expect and that is what you see. You see a well-coached team, a team that plays extremely hard. They don't give you anything easy, they make you work for everything you're going to get, and then if you open the door at all they're going to jump right in there.

They're a really good football team. The obvious thing if you looked at them last year, they had some trouble at the quarterback position, just never got settled

there and a lot of those same faces from last year are back, so they're a very veteran football team. You look at their linebackers, a lot of positions on the team, they have a lot of really not only veteran players but veteran players that have played a couple years, not just one year. They have good personnel.

And on top of that, they have a couple newcomers that have helped the team and got a new offensive coordinator. It looked like they ran their system flawlessly on Saturday. It was very impressive to watch. The new quarterback is giving them stability at that position and we had a lot of respect for him when he was at Indiana. Best way I can describe him, at least from an outsider looking in, I think the guy is a winner. Seems like he does a lot of really good things for his football team from what we saw on them again Saturday night. He's very impressive.

You have a new coordinator, they pick up a grad transfer like that and they have a couple others that have helped the team and then they have a newcomer, their left tackle on offense is a true freshman, a young guy we tried to recruit that we thought the world of, and turns out he's as good as we thought he was. He played really well like a veteran player the other night in his first college game.

Like you'd expect, they have really good football players and we know we have a big challenge on our hands. We're certainly looking forward to being in Kinnick Stadium. It won't be the same, obviously, just like being on the road was a little bit different, but that might even be a bigger thing at home when you expect your home crowd to be there and be part of the action. We'll have to get used to that. We are looking forward to the wave, having an opportunity to do that. That's a good thing certainly and that won't change, but all in all it's a big challenge. We're looking forward to kickoff, and we know we've got a tall order on our hands, we've got really a lot of work to do this week to get ready for a very tough Northwestern football team.

Q. Just a short answer on this is fine. What happened on that illegal substitution or 12-man penalty at Purdue? Looked like you and Phil and Seth were pretty upset. Can you clarify what happened there and your perspective?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the rule is that if the offense subs they're supposed to stand over the ball and give you an opportunity to match substitutions. That's our understanding. Now the question is what's the timing of that, how much time do you have to react. What they told us was we weren't quick enough in that regard. That's their feeling on it, and that just tells us we have to move a little quicker if there are substitutions, and we want to try to match them we have to do something a little quicker.

Q. I know every program is different, but looking at what's going on with Wisconsin and their current COVID situation with quarterbacking, is this year one of those

years where you have to focus on not just the one and two but three and four down the depth chart, making sure they're prepared for any situation?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, probably every coach in the country has been saying that going back to late July. This year as much as anybody, everybody on your roster might have an opportunity to be out there on the field.

It's certainly not a scenario any of us want to be part of, but it's a reality of the world we're living in right now. No question, it's going to be a really unusual year, and we're hardly out of the woods yet one game into the season. We've already seen a lot of things around the country with teams being shut down, pro teams, college teams. We have to stay loose and try to deal with whatever circumstances present themselves, and really no different than everybody has been doing from at least March probably.

Q. Kirk, a couple of other people who were on our initial depth chart that weren't in uniform on Saturday, Logan Lee and Max Cooper. Are they going to be available on Saturday, or how long are they out, if they are?

KIRK FERENTZ: Max will be back. He was injured. I think Logan traveled, but he wasn't in the game. He's been doing a good job. He's been working.

I will take a minute to compliment him. I did in our offensive room watching the tape from this morning. He's working really hard. He's missed a lot of time. Last year he was injured the majority of the season. Obviously we didn't have spring practice, so he's a little frustrated. I talked to him back probably four weeks ago just about being patient, because you've missed a lot of time with the injuries. It's not going to happen as fast as you want it to; just keep working. Back in the summer when we were training and then throughout our practice, the practices we had leading up to last week, he's just been really working hard. I wanted to toot his horn a little bit. He's got a great attitude, a great work ethic, and we're going to see great things out of him as a football player here.

Q. In the age of social media and cameras everywhere and the way recruiting is covered, how does a guy like Sam LaPorta go relatively unnoticed?

KIRK FERENTZ: I got in trouble for saying that's football, but it is football, and it's really life if you think about it. Since we're talking about tight ends, you think about a guy like George Kittle, who probably was a fifth-round draft pick, maybe he was a fourth, but when he came out he had injuries in college, some things held him back. But you watch George, and it's unbelievable how good he has become as a player. You think about his elevation.

You think about a guy like Marshal Yanda, who really nobody recruited and we almost didn't recruit him, and ends up being a really good player for us, third-round draft pick, probably about right based on the way the NFL looked at the guy. And

then I don't know how many Pro Bowls he's gone to and he's got a chance to be a Hall of Famer. It's just a funny thing about football.

I was talking to one of our young players today coming off the field about Bruce Nelson who's a young second-year walk-on who I think has got a really good future here, and I kind of referenced the Bruce Nelson story. He started four years for us; he was a backup third-, fourth-team tight end in 1999 in spring ball and ends up being a four-year starter for us on the offensive line.

I mentioned the left tackle for Northwestern. We figured that out when he was probably in 10th grade and some players are really easy to identify. There are others that just are a little bit more hidden or they develop and improve as they go along, and you do it see that in pro football, and George was a great example of that. He's a much better player now than he was three years ago, but that's because he worked hard. He has a great attitude and he worked hard, and he's also got a pretty good skill set, so it all came together for him. You can't predict that.

Nobody else was recruiting Sam, either, and I'm thankful that we figured it out late in the game at least, and it's turned out pretty well for us.

T.J. Hockenson is another guy, 19th guy in the recruiting class, his recruiting class, ninth guy in the draft. It's all about improvement. It's all about just trying to push and see how much better you can get as a football player.

Q. They have a new OC; is there anything appreciably different, or is it just kind of the same things that Fitz has been running over the years and how do you plan for somebody that's different because they had the same OC for a long time?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no. It doesn't look totally different than what they've done, but it's definitely different. It's his personality, his beliefs are certainly apparent, and it's a little bit interesting because when he was at BC they pretty much ran what BC had been running, and we faced them a couple years ago in the Pinstripe Bowl.

He clearly has some ideas about what he likes and he's an excellent coach, and that showed up.

I think systems don't necessarily win or lose for you; I really believe that. It's really more about execution and what the players do and their belief in the system. The thing that was most impressive to me is just how clean and how polished they played the other night. To me it almost was flawless offensively, and for a new system in a year like this year has been, to do that, to install -- I guess they got 12 spring practices, so maybe they had a little bit of a head start there, but nonetheless, to transition the way they've transitioned and play that flawlessly, that's really impressive, and that's with a new quarterback, too, now. But it's a quarterback who's played and really knows how to play college football. The whole

thing just came together really well for them, and we've got our hands full here because it's run and pass; they do both very well. They're very balanced.

Q. Obviously you guys were pretty effective running the ball last week with 195 yards on the ground, but Northwestern only allowed 64 to Maryland rushing yards last week. What challenges does the Northwestern defensive line present to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're going to be a challenge. I can say that today. It's Tuesday. I can tell you right now, on Saturday it's going to be a challenge only because we've played each other so much. I think one of the things they've done, they've really got an identity defensively, and they know who they are. They know what they believe in, and they are so sound.

So the guys up front, some of those faces have changed, but you have to block them and they make you work every play. I mean, nothing is easy and nothing is clean. You just don't get clean plays against them.

And then on top of it, they've got three veteran linebackers who do a great job of being where they're supposed to be. They've got a couple of safeties who are really involved in the run game, too. Those nine guys really do a good job of making it really difficult to run the football. Whatever we do on Saturday, we're going to have to really earn it if we're going to have any chance at all, and it's tough to scheme them because they're just so fundamentally sound.

It won't be like last Saturday. It's not going to be that kind of -- I'm not saying that was easier but they were easier yards, I guess, maybe to get, and it won't be like that this week. We're going to have to really work and dig.

Q. Just a big-picture question here about halftime adjustments. You hear people talk about it on TV and stuff. What's your process with making adjustments at halftime with Phil or Brian, whatever? Can you kind of paint that picture of what you guys do at halftime?

KIRK FERENTZ: Sure. It really hasn't changed much in 21 years. We come in -- one nice thing about college football, you've got a long halftime, 20 minutes, so we meet offensively, defensively. I'll usually stick my head in if there's something that's hurt us defensively. Just kind of make sure we're all on the same page there. And then I'll sit in with the offense.

Basically we talk about what we saw, what we think might be good, and then it's a matter of getting out there and communicating that to the players, here's what we're thinking, here's some things to expect, et cetera. And then that process is really going on for 60 minutes during the whole game. When the guys come over to the bench, there's a lot of discussion going on. The key thing is whatever it is you're deciding, it really doesn't matter unless you communicate that well to your team, and then you've got to hope you're right on your decisions and the

adjustments that you do make. But it's ongoing, so there's a lot of activity during the entire game actually.

Q. I apologize for asking something about next week, but I'm not sure there will be an opportune time to ask before then. How will you adapt your schedule inside the complex with Tuesday off, and how do you feel about the NCAA's decision to stop athletics for a day for the election?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's great in theory. I didn't know it took that long to vote. This year it seems like a lot of voting has already been done, so it seems like it might have been better to do a team vote, symbolically have everybody together, bus them over and go to the polling place or everybody do their little dropbox deal, something like that.

If we want to do that four years from now, that might be a more powerful representation of what we're trying to deem to be important, and it is important. Voting is extremely important for everybody in our country. So I wholly endorse that concept.

So that's good. A couple years ago I do remember voting mainly because my wife reminds me to and I remember going down I think it's Horace Mann, I got there at whatever time the polls closed, 9:58, and I remember I'm walking to the door, I'm probably about 60 feet from the door and this sweet lady is looking at me and then she just shuts the door right in my face because I was 20 seconds late and she wouldn't let me in. So I didn't vote that year I've got to confess.

So anyway, it is what it is. We decided to do this. I get the concept. I'm totally in support of the concept. I think we could have done it a better way, but nobody asked. So we'll adjust. We're obviously taking Tuesday off, the players are. Coaches will probably be working. I assure you we'll vote but we'll be working and we'll just adjust the schedule, and really it's a couple three-day weeks, right, because I think we've got a Friday game coming up after that, so we're back to back short weeks, if you will.

Q. What did you see from Daviyon Nixon on Saturday, and how important is it for your defense that he continues that level of play moving forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought he did a really good job. I thought he was disruptive, and every player can play better, obviously, and clean some stuff up, but it's our first game. We expect that. I thought he did a lot of good things, brought a lot of good energy and impacted the game. He's been practicing really well. Just really happy about that.

I know he played last year and he started a couple games, I believe, but right now he's a starter, right, so he's really been doing a good job. I'm hopeful everybody on our team keeps playing better week in and week out. That's really the goal and always is every year, and if we're going to have a good team we need everybody

doing that, whether it's a guy like Daviyon or a guy like Spencer Petras who's never really played before. We need everybody just trying to climb the ladder weekly. We expect that from everybody.

Q. Kind of getting back to Sam LaPorta, you've never been shy about playing tight ends mostly in a reserve role as a true freshman, but in his case he just seemed to really grow, and by the end of the year he kind of looked the part, and then the other day he even looked more filled out, his routes seemed a little more crisp. In what ways has he grown over the last year, and is that surprising just based on where he came from?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. Good players, that's what they do. Everybody has a different story. George Kittle was a skinny guy when he got here, 200 pounds, 205, whatever he was, and found a groove and became a really good player for us and then he just kept on growing. Noah got here and played as a freshman and then Sam -- well, let me go back. T.J. did redshirt, drove the defense crazy on scout team. He made a lot of plays against the defense but never played as a freshman. But then Sam was kind of somewhere in between. He was with us last year doing good things on special teams, and with each week we saw a little bit more and more confidence and we got a little bit more and more trust in him and then when we actually started playing him, did some good things, and then he just kept getting better and better. I would venture to say by the end of the year he was a pretty good player for us, and now it's just a continuation of that process.

But that's what good players do. Wirfs kind of had the same deal; Wirfs got thrown in the mix early, whatever it was, fourth or fifth game his first year, and then Tristan did a decent job that year, but he just kept building on it, and that's what good players do and that's what we're hoping for with everybody that we have on our football team.

Q. Do you see any parallels with him and some of his predecessors?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, all of our guys have been different style guys and different stories, I guess. But he's just a good player. The common denominator is he loves football. Like he loves playing. He loves being out there on the field. He enjoys getting his ankles taped. He kind of likes everything about this, and he's got a real good energy, a good vibe, and in that way a little bit Dallas Clarkish almost. Dallas made you feel good when you stand in the same room as him. There's something about him; the guy just really enjoys this environment and clearly likes playing.

We'd all like to take credit for teaching him this or teaching him that, but a lot of that stuff just guys have it or they don't sometimes.

Q. Ihmir obviously didn't have any receptions Saturday. Was that just Purdue concentrating on taking him out? Could you sense some frustration

it looked like from him during the game? And how important is it to get him a little more involved maybe this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we want to get everybody involved. When guys -- skill players typically if they don't get the ball enough, they're going to be frustrated and that's fine because they want to help the team and what have you. But the ball is going to go where it's going to go typically. You can scheme some stuff up and try to do some things. We had him on a run, obviously; did a good job on that. Those were easier to do than in the passing game probably.

But I look at it right now, I think we've got a really good receiving corps potentially and that includes the tight ends, and I think we've got good backs. We've got to protect the ball a little bit better. But if we're operating the way we need to operate, probably everybody is going to get their share of balls. It may not be on one Saturday but over the course of time hopefully that distribution is fairly healthy.

Q. You mentioned Peyton Ramsey in your opening there. Obviously he's a guy you've seen before. What makes him an effective quarterback? Do you see any differences from his start at Northwestern to his time at Indiana?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, I always was impressed with him at Indiana. I'm not second-guessing or suggesting I coached there and I don't make the decision -- they had two really good quarterbacks. That's what it looks like, outsider looking in, because it looks like the other guy is doing pretty well, too, and I haven't seen him on film as much because we haven't played them since he started playing.

But I was always impressed with the way he carried himself on the field, the way he operated. It's not like he's got a tremendous arm or this or that, just exceptional. The guy is just a good football player. I'm not saying he's McSorley, but McSorley the way he was, just his team always won it seemed like. He just has that knack. He's a coach's son so maybe it's got a little something to do with it, he's got a little savvy. But he's just an impressive football player.

Some quarterbacks you say, wow, look at that arm, or boy, is that guy quick or this and that. The bottom line is does your team win, or did he lead your team to victory, and to me that's how you judge quarterbacks. It seems like he does a really good job of it, just he's got that "it" factor, whatever you want to call it.

Q. 10 penalties and two turnovers; I know you talked about it after the game Saturday, but what are the ways you clean those up during practice over the course of the week?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just concentration, and it's fundamentals, obviously. We had three balls on the ground. We lost two of them. One was a tough one. It was one of our guys coming in trying to help the ball carrier, so I'm not faulting anybody. The other one we lost, it was just a matter of a guy at the back he couldn't see. Basically if you look at it from the end zone, it was one of those shots where it kind

of came and caught him by surprise. Those things happen on football fields. You've got to secure the ball.

That is what it is. We've just got to be a little bit more securing the ball, more conscious of our fundamentals and then concentrate, too.

It's the same thing with false starts. Those are typically concentration errors, and if our cadence is a little different because we have a new quarterback, all those things, we're motioning, shifting, that's just concentration. We've got to get that done, otherwise we can't do all those things, and we're not going to change quarterbacks.

We've just got to do a better job concentrating there because five yards is a lot. It's a lot on an offensive series. Any negative yardage plays offensively are bad things.

Q. How did you feel about your pass rush, and do you think -- seemed like they brought pressure from a lot of different angles. Your overall view of it one game in?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the percentage of pressure wasn't maybe as high as I felt like it was coming off the field, but yeah, we'll do what we have to do. It starts with just working hard up front, and we'll continue to work on that. It was okay.

But the more you can disrupt the quarterback, it's not always about sacks, but disrupting the quarterback, disrupting timing, those kinds of things are really helpful. One of the sacks was a good coverage sack. Our coverage was really good and he had to eat the ball.

A lot of good things -- a lot of things go into interrupting a passing game. It's not always just a sack. If we can get some of those it's okay with us, we'll take them.

Q. You played a 4-2-5 last year against Northwestern exclusively. With the new coordinator do you expect that to be the same this time, and also is Hankins your Cash now when you do that, or was that a Purdue-only thing?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we'll see what it looks like. We were pretty happy with that, but we're happy when Dane is down there, too, so probably will be one of the two guys. I would imagine just standing here today we'll probably be in our fair share of sub defenses because of the way they are, their personnel. Although they'll play some two tights. They'll get two tights in the game, and that may put us in our normal defense, as well. So we'll probably have to be prepared for everything.

Q. In a traditional year you would try to use most of September to try to build up to get into Big Ten season and be at a pretty good level, and a lot of times those early games are where you kind of work out the kinks. Does that throw any kind of urgency into the building process versus maybe in

the past you felt like you could, I guess, work your way up through the month of September?

KIRK FERENTZ: In a perfect world, we'd like to have that ability, and traditionally, yeah, we have gotten better. Our good teams at least have gotten better as the year goes on. If we're going to be successful that's paramount. We have to do that. There's just not much wiggle room, as I alluded to earlier, right; it's eight scheduled games plus one, so every game is really critical.

Hopefully we'll show improvement this week from last week. We need to. Just looking at the film from the Maryland game the other night, it could turn fast if we're not ready to go because they've got a good football team and they are -- they're ready to roll. They showed that.

We're going to have to play catch-up here. We're going to have to get moving, and it's every game counts, but you always go back to like the '09 season, it took a miracle basically to win that first game and then we ended up having a team that played pretty well the rest of the season.

Look back to most of our seasons, I guess '09 we didn't lose the game but we played pretty bad, but usually we have a game or two early that we've got to do something about it.

The real key thing right now is how we respond, do we come back and play cleaner and give ourselves a chance to win, at least make Northwestern beat us. We don't want to help our opponent, give them an edge at all in the game.

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