

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 29, 2022

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Head Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference



Iowa 33, Northwestern 13

KIRK FERENTZ: (missing first part of opening statement)... they've been competitive in each and every game despite their record. And they played hard. And we've had our times with them as well. Nobody expected us to control all three phases the way we did. Credit goes to our players on that. Good to get in the win column. Offensively, we were balanced. A lot of guys made contributions statistically.

And then overall, defensively, they had a good day. We had seven different guys get sacks. That's a real credit to the guys, too. They were working hard and glad we were able to contain their back. He's been really productive this year. Quarterback's given them a little bit of a lift. So thought our guys really played well there.

And then special teams, some good things out there obviously, minus that one punt. And credit to Drew, especially for the field goals. The 54-yarder was right where LeVar said his line was, and Drew had a really nice kick.

So again, really happy for our guys, proud of our guys. Happy with the way they pushed forward and went back to work last week. Did a good job. Good to get a win, obviously.

Just one thing that never changes in football, losing stinks, and winning is a really good feeling. So our guys needed to experience that. So we're right back. We have four weeks left in conference play. But the biggest thing is we're moving in November. And November is about playing your best football. That's what it's all about. So that has to be our goal.

We'll look at the tape tomorrow, learn from it and then turn our sights to our next opponent. But hopefully we're playing our best football as we move forward.

**Q. The script seemed to really marry the performance, especially in the first half offensively. You were able to**

**score on all four possessions. Everything lined up. Is this as good as a game you've seen this year? And what seemed to marry so well together offensively?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I wish I could tell you why. But, no question, this was our best offensive performance. When you can play balanced, it starts up front. We certainly blocked better today, more productively that way, both run and pass. Gave Spencer some protection where he could set his feet a little bit and work through his progression. So a lot of good things there. And then if we can run and pass, we're a better football team doing that as well. It was good to see that. We've done some good things along the way, but this was by far the best collective effort we've had.

**Q. When did you get sold that Spencer would be your guy this week? Have you known since Monday or midweek?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Just what I said Tuesday. We went through the week and made that evaluation. We went through Wednesday and felt like he was the best option. It's not a knock on Alex. As I've been saying, it's probably more about the support that either guy has had. And last week was no difference. It's hard to play quarterback if you don't get help from everybody. And I'm not trying to kick the can down the road a little bit. Not that they were perfect. But it really works better if you get a little bit more help.

**Q. But what sold you on it being Spencer, I guess?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably his consistency; the things that we look at at practice every day. Nothing really dramatic. And maybe we made the wrong choice. I don't know. But we'll never know. But I think Spencer did a good job. Credit both those guys for the way they work.

**Q. What was the thought process in the offensive line in the changes you made this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably the biggest thing that resonated with me was that first third down last week. We moved Connor out to tackle, as you know. And he's really been practicing well and improving well during the last several weeks. But you get into live action and all of a sudden if you revert back to some habits and -- not a bad

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habit, but when you're playing guard, there's a little different mechanics and footwork that go with that. That was that first third down last week. Just kind of like hit me in the head that maybe it's time to consider.

And then Jack came in and helped stabilize us a little bit. So he's played a lot of football for us. And he had a great week of practice. Eager to see the film, but it seemed like we were a little bit more cohesive today. And hopefully we can build on that. That will really help us.

**Q. Do you see left guard as the new home for Connor Colby?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably. Keep our fingers crossed we can stay healthy. So those five guys that started the game, Elsbury and then also DeJong are still probably the top seven guys right now. A year ago at this time, we went through the same thing a little bit. I felt like we started gaining traction the last four games. Maybe we got a week jump on it this time. If we can stabilize that part of things a little bit, I think it's going to help us overall.

**Q. Even going back to spring, you guys have had receiver injuries, trying to get guys up to speed. It really seems like this week it all started to come together, whether it that be with Deontae, eight different guys have a reception. How valuable is that to have that versatility?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It really helps an awful lot. Luke made a great play down there on that one touchdown. Deontae had a couple near misses, but hopefully that's going to come for him. He's frustrated a little bit. But good to see him practicing, playing with us. That's been great. Brody, seems like he's grown a little bit. He's a young guy. So it is healthy to go along with Nico. And we had a catch and run instead of catching and falling down. That helps a lot too. Just helps everything go a little bit smoother.

**Q. Along with your quarterback in the first half, I think he was 14 of 18, but three of the passes were right there and another one was a thrown away, which was a good play.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. It was.

**Q. How good do you feel for him to be able to put that kind of together after last week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He ran a couple times and didn't look terrible, so that was good. I'm happy for him. Selfishly, he's -- it's rough, you know, when we're not winning. That's rough for everybody. I know he's been a little bit of a magnet for criticism or critique. It's part of playing the

position. It's part of playing the game. I am happy to see him -- I think we all believed in him, and we believe in Alex, too, just going back to that. It's not like putting one against the other. I am happy to have him have success, just like our whole football team. We needed it.

**Q. Coach, one of your players said this was probably the most fun he's had all season. Is this the most fun you've had all season?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I'd say that easy. Yeah, no question. The guys did a good job. As much as anything, I am just proud of the way the guys have stayed the course. They've been practicing well. Not that we weren't practicing well, but at some point you hope there's a cumulative effect. No guarantees. As I've been saying, that's the only thing I know is you go back to work, hope everybody's focused, hope everybody's doing what they're supposed to do.

I know -- I'm sure it's this way in any sport, as a coach, you just never know, you never know how every day is going. You know what you see, but you really don't know. And I think the response today by our guys says a lot about them.

**Q. 88 rushing yards for Kaleb Johnson. What did you see from him today?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He just keeps improving. And there are a couple things to correct tomorrow. I know that. Some switching the ball a little bit in traffic, things like that. There were a couple of them looked like he could have taken it north a little faster instead of going to the sideline. He's done a nice job. He's grown each week and has a great attitude. That's been consistent since we got going. He has a great attitude. He enjoys playing. You can see that when you watch him and he enjoys practice, too. Leshon did a good job. Hopefully we get Gavin, hopefully nothing too serious with him.

**Q. I noticed he wasn't in uniform toward the end.**

KIRK FERENTZ: He tweaked his ankle. So hopefully it's not too bad. He didn't think it was. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

**Q. What's it like for you to be a part of a game this year, a win this year where all three parts had such a good performance? It wasn't like you had two safeties or two defensive touchdowns.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Outstanding. We just haven't had one of those yet. And that's what you're always hoping for. So hopefully this will give our guys confidence and at least

start building it a little bit.

One thing I did tell them is, like, you know, sometimes you can be really close to something. You have no idea. Unless you keep pushing, you'll never know. Credit to our guys for keeping their heads up. Keep pushing. Fortunately, today, our execution was a little bit better.

It will be a whole new challenge next week. We all know that. I do know this. If you're working hard on the practice field, studying like you should, at least you give yourself a chance. I am happy to see our guys have some success that way.

**Q. Spencer's first career home start was against these guys, you were up 17-0 and you kind of melted down the second half. Similar today when you took a big halftime lead but then you finished the job and played really well. Does that give you a sense of the growth he's made?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I hope so because, we've played these guys two years in a row. And I mentioned that at halftime. We had a lead and then all of a sudden we were fighting for our lives in one case. And then came out successfully. And, again, I'll go back to the statement I made about Northwestern. Outside of one game, they've been right there in every game, including a win in Ireland. So we have total respect for them and understand if you're going to beat these guys, you've got to play for the full 60. Outside of that one little -- whatever how many minute spurt that was to open the second half, I think we played pretty good football. Left a lot to be desired during that whatever it was, three, four minutes.

**Q. Asked about Tory Taylor's Heisman chances?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yeah. In his defense, the only thing I thought of -- and I know they warmed up at halftime again, but it's a rare time when he hasn't had much activity. So maybe that threw him off. If that did, I hope we make that a pattern. And we'll figure something out.

**Q. Spencer told us that he's gotten a lot of help from a sports psychologist. I realize that's nothing new for probably you guys or anybody. You a big proponent of that?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I am. And I guess first time I really kind of became aware of it was maybe through baseball, reading the papers. And I'm going back to the '90s now. I think it was the Indians were using -- Cleveland Indians were into that pretty deep. If I remember correctly, the gentleman was from New Jersey. Can't give you more details. I've got the article somewhere in my office if you

want to look.

But, anyway, I know baseball has been probably in front of us. Golfers. I know Zach Johnson's got a team. And there's a lot to be said for that. Just trying to keep a clear mind on what you're trying to do. And especially someone like him who's in a really -- a position where he's going to get critiqued a lot. So I'm all for it. But it's like anything else. You've got to have the right people working.

**Q. It's even more difficult today with the social media and just constantly the negativity that he would have to face, just turn on his phone --**

KIRK FERENTZ: To say I feel bad for our players or all young people right now, that's probably not the best way to describe it, but I think it's a real challenge. Anywhere I go, I see people with their -- not only younger people but all people with their heads on their phones. Amazed how much they're missing in real life, just talking to people and some of those things.

But people in sports, absolutely. And we try to encourage our guys to budget their time. I'm not going to tell them not to go on social media, but be smart about it. And then the biggest thing is I think if you're competing, performing, whatever, be careful about whose opinions you really are paying attention to because it can do a lot of damage. And we all have people in our lives we really care about how they look at us and what they think. So hopefully our guys do that. But it's a nonending battle. That's for sure.

**Q. Kirk, we've seen you guys go through a multi-game losing stretch and finish off the season strong. You guys are now back in the winning column. How do you keep that momentum riding? What's the key to kind of continuing to make that switch?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's all about the players and just -- LeShun Daniels is our honorary captain. He talked about a couple tough outings, Penn State, then came back and won three against two ranked teams. So he mentioned that yesterday. But it really just gets down to somehow you've got to be mentally tough enough to put things behind you and stay focused on what's in front of you and then focused on what's important. That's the biggest thing I can say. The better you can do that, at least you give yourself a chance.

And, you know, that's why they schedule 12 games. The season wasn't over last week. So we'll be right back in the same situation tomorrow, trying to learn from what we did, good and bad, and then shift our sights to the next opponents and try to keep it right there. Like social media, that's a real tough battle to face too.

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But the better people understand, let's worry about what's in front of us, the better chance we have at doing something like that. The teams that have done that well have done that. They've had mental toughness. They've stayed together. And we've had seasons, too, where it didn't go so well. And that's always a possibility. But one thing I feel good about, I think we have really good leadership on our team. At least that gives you a chance to keep everybody going the right direction.

**Q. You've had a lot of adversity over the last month on the field, off the field, family, people talking a lot. What was the -- what did it feel like to be able to go in the locker room and celebrate and have everybody be so happy in that moment?**

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, we all signed up for this, you know. And I say that all the time. We're here by choice. Couldn't imagine doing anything else. I think our players feel the same way. But, yeah, like I -- I said that with the staff the other day, one thing that never changes. When you win, you feel better. Things just feel better in general. And when you lose, there's no way to -- and I guess if you get numb to it, then you might as well get used to losing because that's what's going to happen.

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