

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Tuesday, November 22, 2022

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everyone. Appreciate you being here as always.

A couple words about Minnesota and then we'll move on. As I said Saturday, thrilled to get the victory. Great to be able to bring Floyd back with us. That's always a good thing.

It got down to us playing good football in all three phases. Special teams really did a great job. A lot of good play by everybody.

Proud of the way the guys have hung in there, worked and shown improvement. We haven't had many easy games, that's for sure. Saturday was obviously an example of that. That really kind of transitions us into this week.

We got back fairly late, had some challenges at the airport, mechanical stuff, things like that. Ended up being a late arrival.

Went through the tape on Sunday, like always. Switch gears, our focus has strictly been on Nebraska since Sunday afternoon. Short week. A little tighter window for our preparation.

So far so good. I think our guys are focused right now, focused on the right things. A little adjustment to the schedule. Fortunately, we've had a lot of experience in these types of games, the short weeks. I don't think there's anything overly surprising.

Our opponent, they've been really I think impressive if you consider the changes that have been to the program. They've had a couple injuries, quarterback in and out. Just continue to play and compete and do really well.

Upgraded their roster over the course out of season. They got a lot of transfer guys in, a lot of guys that are dangerous, productive players.

But the biggest thing is they've continued to compete. All you got to do is look back at last week, they had a 14-3

lead on Wisconsin, who had to really work hard to pull that out at the end. We know firsthand how difficult it is to beat Wisconsin. It's never been easy.

They're playing well. They're competing hard. We expect a tough, tough ballgame here Friday needless to say.

Same four captains. Jack, Sam, Kaevon and Riley. All those guys have done a great job.

Injury-wise, don't expect Sam or Monte to play. Don't think that's realistic.

Positive news, Beau Stephens was back at practice today. He'll be available. I don't know how ready he'll be. He's missed some time here. He's a young player. Not like he's got a lot of experienced banked up.

We have a chance to honor 27 seniors as well as student-athlete managers, assistants in the office, all that type of thing. But 27 players that have just done a great job throughout their career. That's always a little bit of bittersweet thing. You see the players come out, meet their parents, kind of always an emotional deal for everybody involved. That starts there.

One of the cooler aspects, you have guys that are rather well-known, obviously household names if you will in our state. Got a lot of other guys, too, that maybe aren't as well-known, yet they're all very valuable.

Jack Campbell making a big play, a guy like Tom Hartleib who has done a great job for our years here on the scout team, helping us prepare. That's something we talk to our players about, everybody has a role. If you're a good football team, you have a role. I can say that about each and every one of the 27 guys we have walking on Saturday. That part is really good.

Beyond that, I say it every year, but just such tremendous respect for anybody that can run this entire race because it's not easy. It's not like playing football 40 years ago. Time commitment is a lot more extensive. It's year-round basically. We've had some guys with injuries, part of the game. Hard to get through a career without being injured. So many things just football-wise, not to mention working to get a degree, despite a big time commitment towards the sport.



The other part is all players, college athletes, are held to our level of scrutiny. I can't say enough about the respect I have for all 27 of them. It will be a special day from that standpoint. I want to compliment those guys.

One thing unique to this group, they all got here before COVID so they experienced the COVID years, playing in front of no people. Cardboard cutouts. Getting tested daily. All the crazy stuff that went on in that '20 season. These guys experienced that. They've seen the good and the bad.

Hopefully this Friday will be a full stadium instead of the cardboard cutouts like last time we played Nebraska in Kinnick. Looking forward to that.

Our kid captain is Dylan McGivern, a 10-year-old with muscular dystrophy. I understand he's a positive young guy, great attitude. Our cheering squad is going to get a little bit bigger because his brother Brady, his mom and dad will be here. I'm told 50 of his relatives are coming from all across the country. Really neat to have him with us.

Last but not least, I wish you a great Thanksgiving. If you're a football coach, cover football, your calendar gets screwed up when it comes to holidays, this time of year. I hope everybody has a chance to be with family and enjoy a good day. We'll do that Wednesday, then again Saturday. That's our schedule. Thursday will be business as normal.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Kaleb Johnson going to be available? Is he fine...

KIRK FERENTZ: He's fine.

Q. What's the severity of the injuries to Sam and Monte? Do you expect them back for a potential game next week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Better news. It could have gone either way. You never know what to think coming off the field. They both got tested yesterday. I think things look about as good as they can. We'll just take it a day at a time. The door is open, but not this week.

Q. Terry Roberts?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's out.

Q. What has he meant to this team? One of the seniors you feel for...

KIRK FERENTZ: You do. I'm not sure he's ever gotten back to full strength whenever it was, late October. It's tough. He's tried, worked at it. He shut it down here a couple weeks ago, four, five weeks ago.

He's been such a spark player for us, did such a great job on special teams, a real catalyst. When he played in the defensive backfield, he's played well.

It's hard. I say it every time you talk about a major injury, it's harder on nobody more than the player, the individual, because all the investment they make. You only get 12 games guaranteed. Any time you lose one or half a one, that's important.

It's really tough here because it happened at the back end of his career. There's not next year. At least Jermari Harris has next year in front of him. It makes it that much harder. It's hard on our football team, but it's tough on the individual.

Q. Talking to the players today, the implications of this game, seems like they're dissociated from what this game could mean. Is it difficult to do that as a team? How have you seen them have a businesslike approach?

KIRK FERENTZ: I hope they can do it. I skipped over that point. These guys are all college students. They probably follow football more than I do quite frankly with the outside world.

I think we all know what's at stake. My encouragement has been to them we have to focus on this week purely, that's what it's all about. That's our attitude five weeks ago. That was the goal. We had five games, five weeks. One of the points I made to them, you can do anything for five weeks. Let's make sure we're really focused on what we need to be. Now we're down to four days. That's all that counts.

I do know this. Going back to the first one, after coming out of Columbus, if we hadn't won that one, being in this position right now wouldn't be possible. Just try to explain to them that game was really important, too, just like this one on Friday is important.

I don't think anything is more important than the other in the big picture. If you take care of what you're supposed to take care of, you might be fortunate enough to be in a good position. We find ourselves there now.

The worst thing we can do right now is start thinking about things on the outside, other stuff. We have to worry about getting ready for a tough opponent.

Q. You said earlier this year when you came here from Pittsburgh, all you knew about the Big Ten was Ohio State, Michigan. You got to go against Bo many times as the offensive line coach here, but do you know anything about Amos Alonzo Stagg?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've done some reading on him, yeah, a while back. I know he coached until his 90s. I think he ended up coaching with his son out in California. I shouldn't say they ran him out, but they decided it was time for him to quit at Chicago.

I remember reading 'When Pride Still Mattered', I believe it was. They cited him, whatever year it would have been. I can't remember what he was making, but the whole faculty was up in arms at the University of Chicago. It's not like this a new phenomena, this whole new market stuff.

The biggest thing is he obviously was a really good football coach. Coached forever. But that's like all I know. Football's a little different back then. University of Chicago, Carnegie Mellon played the Rose Bowl somewhere in the '30s to put it in perspective. Had to have been a pretty good coach, coached for a while.

Q. What can you tell us about Eli Miller?

KIRK FERENTZ: What do you want to know (laughter)?

Q. How did you guys find him?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's got an Iowa tie. His role is he and his dad I think are natives. Ended up out in Colorado. I don't know how he got here, but I'm glad he did. He's a good student, serious student, has taken stuff I would never even dream of. He's just a good young guy.

Obviously we have a couple senior fullbacks on our roster right now. One of the things we out of this season talked about who might be the prospect to be the next guy. He was the guy we decided might be a good prospect. He's quietly done a really nice job.

It's a little unsettling not to have Monte because he's one of our best players on our football team, one of our best leaders. Eli has things in a way where you have confidence. He's a wired-in guy, goes one speed.

We'll play him on Saturday, Friday, and I'm sure he'll do a great job.

Q. Do a lot more 11 this week with no Sam, fullback?

KIRK FERENTZ: Changes things. Sam is Sam, arguably our best guy on offense. Then Monte can do so many

things, play in different positions, help us. It kind of limits what we have to do. We have to be smart about it.

The good news is Luke Lachey has improved week over week the last couple years, has done a good job. Ostrenga did a good job jumping in there. We'll have to play him more. We have to find a way to get it done. We'll adjust our personnel a little bit.

Q. When you get together for Nebraska, throw out the records, last four years a single possession, is that something you've emphasized to your team?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. It's like five points a win last four years. Most of them have gone right down to the wire. That's what you have to expect. That's how you look at it. Typically nothing is easy for us. That's kind of the way of life. It's just to find a way to win at the end.

Yeah, we're expecting this to be a real tough game. They've got some good players.

Q. How would you describe Jack Campbell's importance over the last few years to this defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: An exceptional player, exceptional team member on top of it. To me that's where the double value is. That's what good players do. Like, they not only play well, but they also make the guys around them play better. He's definitely done that.

Whether it's on the field, off the field, away from the building, it's not hard to like everything he does. A top-notch guy. Great to see him. He's a finalist in the Butkus Award. That's really neat and great. I'm sure the other four guys are outstanding, too.

He's a special player. He just kept getting better. Like his high school basketball career, I always joke about that, where it took him four minutes to get five fouls as a sophomore. Then he became a pretty good high school basketball player on a really good team.

He's done the same thing in football. He's just improves with every opportunity. He's just a leader because of who he is. I think everybody just respects so much who he is and how he does things.

Q. You've sent several linebackers to the NFL. How does Jack compare to guys on that board?

KIRK FERENTZ: Without knowing every guy up on that board, Tippett was a rare NFL Hall of Fame player, and he was a rare guy back in 1981. But outside of that, Chad Greenway was a pretty good player, Josey. Had a lot of

good guys. Jack fits in with pretty much any group you can find.

The difference, Andre Tippett weighed about 260. Really good player, but a huge man, too, though. Different class. Different era.

Anybody up there is pretty good. Jack is not up there yet, right? I'm going to go out on a limb and say he's got a chance.

Q. Any favorite moments or memories of Jack?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, this is going to strike you odd, but the first thing I think about is going to watch him practice basketball his senior year. One of the best practices I've ever attended in any sport. It was impressive. The whole group was just wired in. Greenway is the same thing, ironically. That included eighth graders. Just the team chemistry, the way they operated efficiently. It was just a impressive practice. Not that I know anything about basketball.

Again, you could see the same dynamic with him, younger players, there's so much to the way he operates. He's had a lot of good ones here.

I don't know about a favorite one. That pick the other day might be right at the top of the list. He kind of got, I don't want to say cheated, but he had an opportunity for a touchdown that didn't materialize. That's too bad.

Q. There weren't any penalties called. Going back over the tape I am sure you saw a few that should have been called.

KIRK FERENTZ: Boy, my wife reminded me when I got home, as late as it was. She was a little bit amazed by the lack of holding calls. I don't want go there. That was her saying it, not me (laughter).

Q. In a bad weather game, do officials ever kind of come to you and say, We're not going to...

KIRK FERENTZ: No. I was not aware of that statistic. I knew there wasn't much going on, but no penalties. You guys told me it was '86 when the last time that happened. So it's rare.

The game was going pretty well from my vantage point outside of a couple things. There's always a couple things. I thought the crew did a good job. I don't know if the weather factored in there or not.

Q. With the amount of replays, do you think there

needs to be an emphasis on don't blow the whistle?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes (smiling).

They pretty much do that on ball carriers typically to make sure. So, yeah. I've changed my opinions on replays. I was in favor of them at one point. Now I think they're hurting our game almost in some ways.

I don't know. It's a whole different deal.

Q. How would you evaluate offensive coordinator the last four weeks? Seems like there's a lot less complaining out there. Making the most of what you've got. What positive are you taking?

KIRK FERENTZ: With all that stuff, maybe when the season is over...

I think the big thing is we've gotten better as a team each week. We've talked a lot about the line. The line had a setback two weeks ago, but they bounced back and competed hard and pretty well.

I kind of look at the whole picture. Coordinators are important on minimizing them in any of the three phases. Still gets down to players doing things they're able to do. You have to be realistic about who you have, what their experience levels are, things like that. Those are things I'm always thinking about before I formulate an opinion about something.

Ultimately it's about finding a way to win. We've been able to do that the last four weeks. Hopefully we can do it for five.

Q. On the O-line, do you expect the same five starters even because of Beau Stephens?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it will be the same. It will be good to get him back for depth purposes. If he was a fifth-year guy, maybe he'd be right back in there. He's so young, still learning so much on the job.

The good news is we were really thin last Saturday. At least we get somebody back who we can put in the game. Keep pushing forward. Hopefully we keep getting better.

Q. What have been your impressions of Ostrenga and his development since he got here?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's one of those guys, you're never quite sure what's in the box when you open it up.

Everything about him has been very impressive. I mean,



everything. What he does on the field is one thing, but how they handle the training, how they handle their academics, feedback you get from academic folks, anybody with the players is important to us. Everything is just so positive.

Maybe most impressive, this is really true for younger guys, some guys don't seem to be overwhelmed. Maybe they should be, but they don't act that way. He's kind of done that in practice. He's taken shots from guys like Campbell and some of those other guys. He just gets up and keeps going. That's an impressive thing.

He's kind of handled everything the more you play him, the more things are apt to pop up, whatever. He seems to have the mental toughness where he can handle some disappointment, come back and go back to work.

Q. Seems like Brody is kind of stepping into his own. What have you seen, what has impressed you?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's amazing when you practice, like actually practice, do it on a routine bases, like improvement follows it. That was part of our challenge. We never got to see him up until September of this year. I have to go back and count how many practices it would have been, bowl preparation. That's basically been our window because he had the hand injury a year ago. We didn't have him at all in the spring. He didn't train, didn't do anything June, July, August with us due to injury.

I think it was our first game week was his first week on the field. To think you're going to play major college football at a real high level just walking in it doesn't work that way.

I agree wholeheartedly each week he looks more comfortable. He made a really tough catch the other night, which was a really big play. Big 20-yard gain or something like that, but it was a huge play a conversion. It took real focus and concentration. He beat his guy on a tough, tight play. 10 weeks ago he couldn't have done that in my mind. Now he's getting it going.

We've always been high about him. Great young guy with an awesome attitude. If you're injured, you can't do anything. It's just hard to get better if you're not working.

It's rare a guy can just walk in and be a really good player. It just doesn't work that way. Kaleb has been the same thing. He is a freshman, but with each week we see him getting better.

Q. How would you assess Sebastian Castro?

KIRK FERENTZ: Different story because it has been a couple years in the making. Tough, competitive guy. We

thought he had a chance to be a good defensive back. This wasn't actually planned, his immersion into the lineup. With our depth situation, he was next guy up.

He has embraced it and done a nice job. I am happy for him. That's what the whole thing is about, keep working, when your called upon, like Jermari Harris a year ago, jump in and do something. Two guys from the South Chicago area that have done a good job. They're both good guys. That's really helpful.

Q. Merriwether, basically being one of the biggest vocal leaders on the team in 2020, from your point of view how valuable is his leadership over the past three seasons? How would you describe what he means in the locker room but also the community?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. Outside of Brody, the guys we're talking about weren't recruited heavily enough. Kaevon fits that bill, too.

To your last point, I would circle back. That's one of the things that attracted us to him. Good basketball player, good athlete. I really think a lot of things are transferrable if a guy has the toughness, mental toughness, doesn't mind getting smacked around, trying to smack other guys. It's a little different than basketball that way.

His personality... His mom, they're great folks. That jumped out at us immediately. Recruiting people, not just players or positions typically. I don't think it's a huge surprise, but the credit goes to him, just like all the other guys we're talking about. It goes back to doing that work. He has done that. He has also embraced being a leader. I always appreciate that.

You talk about Jack Campbell, Kaevon, I think that's one of the reasons we've been good at defense. We have guys at every position, not that they're all the same, Kaevon is definitely a veteran, him and Riley are the two veterans in that group. Up front you have Noah, John Waggoner, Joe Evans, and linebackers we have a couple guys. They'll be talking on Saturday.

You have that type of leadership in every group, they impact that room individually, but they impact that room when they're all together, the whole team. That's how you build a winning team. You have to have the right guys, though. We really appreciate that.

Q. Among your seniors, I'm sure you have some you are contemplating bringing them back, they're contemplating coming back. Do you encourage everybody to walk, then worry about it?

KIRK FERENTZ: We haven't had those conversations yet. As far as I know, there's no NCAA rule yet about if you walk, you're ineligible from there on. As long as we don't give them a thousand bucks on the way out...

Yeah, we encourage them to do that. They can always change their mind. If they have second thoughts, it would definitely be worth a consideration.

We'll have a couple of those down the road, but right now go and be honored. Who knows, next year we might have a pandemic again. I shouldn't joke about that at all, it's not funny.

Q. Big Ten media days, the videos all the coaches do, you mentioned offensive yardage being the most overrated statistic. Now you won back-to-back games not having the advantage in that stat. What is your rationale for why that is overrated?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not against it, first of all, just for the record (smiling).

Bill Russell said the most important stat is winning and losing. That's the most important one. The next most important one in my opinion is turnovers and takeaways, if you're looking over the long haul. That's where it all starts.

Then probably somewhere, it's scored points against, which ties into the goal number one or most important stat. You try to navigate the terrain based on where you're at, where your team is at, all that kind of stuff. Not against getting yards, certainly not against getting points.

Sometimes there's things that come with that. Everybody lives in a different world. I'd even venture this, when you get to January, whatever it is this year, when the last two teams are playing, that turnover takeaway is probably going to be more important than the yardage thing unless you can out-distance your opponent by a couple hundred yards on the board, you got a good chance to win.

At the end of the day it's about figuring out a way to win the game. I think we showed up the other night somehow, some way, forced a couple turnovers. That was the difference in the game really. We did a good job of protecting the ball, being smart when we had to be, coming up with what we had to come up with.

My thoughts haven't changed a lot in 23 years. It started well before that. You're thinking about what is it that's important. We're all shaped by something, right? We're all shaped by our past, the people I've been around, have had the good fortune to work with have impacted me a lot in terms of the way I look at the game.

Q. (Question about celebrating Thanksgiving.)

KIRK FERENTZ: Tomorrow night we will do a really nice dinner right here. Players' families won't be here, but our families are going to be here. It's a real nice opportunity to have fellowship with each other.

I will highlight tomorrow's meeting, just some quotes kind of ring true about what the holiday is all about, giving thanks for everything, being grateful for the things we have.

Worst-case scenario, we all have a pretty good deal going compared to a lot of other folks. Just echo that a little bit.

Thursday well, it will be like just a Friday for us. Friday will be a Saturday. One nice thing about playing on Friday, it gives us Saturday off to be with our families. Our players might have that same opportunity. It's a great deal. Best holiday going. You eat good food and have to bring guests.

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