

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



COACH FERENTZ: First just want to start off by thanking our fans for the great turnout on Saturday. It was a tremendous crowd. I can't remember a Labor Day weekend game where we had such a good environment, an electric environment in Kinnick. It was good for our players and coaches. We appreciate that greatly and great support.

Also just want to recognize the new tradition that started Saturday. What a great marriage that is with the stadium being in such close proximity to the Stead Family Children's Hospital and then I really didn't witness it or notice it during the game, certainly, but I've seen the clips now since, and the coverage on it.

It's really a positive event for everybody, and it's obviously very heartwarming for everybody in the country to get an exposure to such a great tradition, so we are happy about that as well.

This is certainly a big week for us. It's a rivalry game. I think it's certainly big for everybody involved with Iowa football and just football in general in Iowa. I think anybody that follows the game certainly takes great interest in it. It's energizing, certainly, for our players, our coaches, alums, everybody that's involved, fans, and I think not only in our state but probably across the country. So it's really a great series.

This is my 28th involvement in the series, so I feel very, very fortunate to be part of it, and relish every opportunity to get a chance to coach and it's just a really good thing.

Beyond that I think it means an awful lot to our players, as well. We have 23 players right now in our two-deep that grew up in this state, 57 total on our roster from Iowa. So they grew up watching this series. I think they know fully what it means, just the interest and what's at stake for everybody involved. It's a really significant thing on that end, as well.

So just a lot of good things to be excited about this weekend. In the meantime, we've got a lot of work to do in our preparation. Our captains this week defensively are Josey Jewell and Nathan Bazata. Offensively, Sean Welsh, and special teams will be Kevin Ward again. They will represent our guys for the coin toss.

Iowa State was very, very impressive in their opening night victory. The other night they played a really good football game. And on top of that, we're traveling to go a place that's very, very tough to play. We've been there many times every other year, and it's always a tough environment. Those two things combined offer us a real big challenge right now.

So we are well into our work week right now and certainly have a lot of things to do before getting ready to get on the bus on Friday. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Your defense after Week 1, where you surprised they were that good, that quick?

COACH FERENTZ: It's one game. We're not quite ready to make judgments yet but certainly pleased with the way we played and I think probably the most positive thing was just our responses to the bumps that took place. You're hoping those things don't take place but going into any first game, you're never sure, any game, for that matter.

But first games, especially, you're a little bit anxious about just how you're going to perform with some new guys at critical spots, and we didn't protect the ball very well. That was very evident.

But our defense never broke stride. They went out and responded in a real positive way. I think it was a big positive. Probably as good a thing as I saw out there.

Q. What was the biggest difference from year 1 to year 2 when you took over the Iowa program?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not an expert but just an outsider's opinion, it looks like they transitioned a lot faster than we did. It took us quite a while to get some traction.

From my vantage point, midseason on, they were playing much better. The first half of the season, you take all those tapes, really and just throw them out. They are not much value for us to look at.

But I think midseason on, they started to -- people kind of started embracing what they were doing, what the staff was selling, at least watching on film. Started playing together and got really positive results. Had a

couple really good wins but also losing to Oklahoma, Kansas State the way they did; they were playing and certainly we saw further progress Saturday. Looked like a really good football team on Saturday.

Q. Is James Daniels back at practice and is he back to where you thought he was?

COACH FERENTZ: He had a good day today. So we are hoping, you know, makes it through the week and is ready to go.

Q. Your tackling looked good last week, particularly with the special teams.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we did some good things in both those areas. Tackling, that's another thing I was pleased about. Defensively, first game. You always worry about that. So for first time out, that was a good start, and the special teams.

My beef with the extended preseason is not necessarily -- we had good teaching time. I have no complaints on that. The complaints are just, you know, we're cutting into the players' calendars. And we talk about being more mindful of that. Yet at the same time, we go the other direction.

I think there needs to be some modifications made to that thing eventually, but all in all, it wasn't that big a deal. Regret our guys starting a week early, that's all.

Q. How does your quarterback practice getting tackled?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if there is an answer other than game experience. It starts with an awareness, like anything else. You have to realize, things close down quickly, and those guys in the other-colored jerseys are always going to be reaching for the ball and trying to knock it out. I think it's just more of a mental thing, a mental awareness thing than.

Q. Josh Jackson, was that just a case of a guy needing some time?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's always worked hard, and he's got a great attitude. He likes football. There's no question about that. That was really evident. Just wasn't a real detailed guy at the start, some of the things that are really critical; and if you're going to be a defensive back, it's important to know you have some certain responsibilities.

I think it's overall maturation, which you see with a lot of players. Attitude was never a question with him. His work ethic was always good. It's kind of keeping things between the lines a little bit better. It just seems like last year, he really started to blossom a little bit. I can go back to two seasons ago. He saw some things on film, things he was doing, and playing well on special

teams. Doing some things there that really gave us encouragement.

You're hoping to get channelled into being a good positional player, too, and we're starting to see that now. He got off to a great start the other day but also played a little bit there at the end of the season last year, too, because of injury.

We're really optimistic. He's got a really good future.

Q. Is Bradley Fletcher a fair comparison?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they are not the same player but the progress is probably; I think that's fair, yeah. Bradley was a good special teams guy. Took a little while for things to click defensively and boy, when they did, he played really well. So they are a little different style guy, but yeah, I think that's probably a fair comparison as far as the development goes.

Q. Did you go in last week planning to play three, maybe four wide receivers?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. The game dictated some things to us, a lot of things that happened offensively. But we didn't get a lot of snaps to start with, and when you turn the ball over, that's what's going to happen. Price you pay.

I think we're open to more guys playing. I think we'll see more guys playing here in the next couple weeks but we have to have that opportunity to get them out there.

Q. Looking at your cornerbacks again, and the receivers that they faced, first of all, the challenges, what do they present, Lazard and Hakeem Butler? And being young, they performed well, so what's your confidence level with them going against Iowa State?

COACH FERENTZ: It's an interesting matchup that way. Their experience is on the perimeter where our inexperience is prominent.

And then other thing they have, they have great size, unusual size. Those two guys you just mentioned would be a good start to a basketball team, intramural basketball team if you're going to do that.

So matching up size-wise is going to be a challenge and they use their size well. And then their experience. They have a good group, a good core of receivers, but it's more than two guys. So we're all going to have to do a good job and that includes our linebackers, again. You have Ben Niemann out in coverage quite a bit and they will get Bo out there in coverage the way they do things. They are going to put some pressure on us. There's no question about that. That's their design.

Q. You came out and said this game has special importance, when you go out on banquet tours do you hear from fans that you need to place more emphasis on this game?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, yeah, we do things the way we do. Fans have a lot of opinions about a lot of things, which is great. I'm glad they are passionate and interested. We try to do things in a consistent way and from my vantage point, every game is really important. The one we played last week is. You only get 12 of them, so boy, you'd better be focused on all those.

To suggest that one doesn't mean a lot, I go back to the Minnesota game. It was my first experience where a team came across to pick up a trophy, and that was 1981. That's a snapshot memory you never forget. You get involved in that, or our trip to Ames that year wasn't that much fun either.

When you experience something, that's where you really learn and that's 55 years ago, right, when that happened, 1981. But those memories, they never leave you. If you're a part of something -- I've been part of this thing for a long time. I'll go to my grave thinking about those games, that's for sure. You always remember losses, right.

Q. Where do you think that narrative comes from; that one side cares more than the other?

COACH FERENTZ: I kind of found it insulting in some ways. You know, it's almost like you don't care. That's really insulting to say to anybody that competes in anything.

I don't know, I guess I haven't jumped up and down. Have to do some jumping jacks or something, be a little bit more demonstrative out there. When you win, what you do is great. When you lose, not so great. I think it's just kind of part of that narrative.

Q. VandeBerg has had some big success against ISU, is someone you expect to perform well in a game like this?

COACH FERENTZ: First play I thought about when you mentioned his name was him following a fumble, picking up a fumble.

We're going to need everybody. We're going into a really tough environment against a good football team. We're going to need everybody and I would say all of our guys that have played, we are going to need them to play their best. That's going to be true all season long. But especially early in the season right now when our younger guys are getting their footing. To have guys like Matt, Sean Welsh; go right down the list,

those guys are going to really have to play well and help steady the ship a little about it.

Q. How much can attribute Matt's performance to his health?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, being healthy helps everybody. So he's a good football player, and when he can go, he goes. He's got one speed and he's had that since he got here.

He was really skinny when he got here and he's grown into an adult football player now and he's a good football player. We're better when he's out there playing for us.

Q. Nate showed some good composure despite making some mistakes, how much composure will he need heading into a hostile environment?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a really tough place to play for anybody who visits there. It's going to be another test for him. Last week was his first test playing where he was the starting quarterback.

This is week No. 2, and it's about as tough as it's going to get for him. It will be another measure for him. The good thing is, he went through some adversity Saturday and responded well. Certainly encouraging, and his teammates supported him well and that helps, too. I'm sure he'll be in those situations again this weekend and hopefully we can push through it and find something good.

Q. Has Alaric Jackson earned the starting left tackle spot, or is he just holding it down until Boone comes back?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll play Boone at guard and tackle. We're comfortable playing all of those guys. As long as Boone can go, he's still a really good football player in our mind. He's a senior, you talk about seniors and Boone, he's a really aggressive, physical player out there. Having him out there makes us a better team whether it's guard or tackle.

Alaric has done a really nice job, so we're pleased with his growth and development. The good thing about having guys injured, I guess is hopefully you develop some guys that get some depth and experience. Ross Reynolds got some good experience the other day. Keegan playing center was good for him in the long run. We'll all feel better if we get our guys back in the right chairs and full speed.

Q. Is it somewhere like a Riley Reiff situation, where he replaced Bryan Bulaga when Bulaga was out, and then really benefited from the experience?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely, yeah. Absolutely. I thought he did a good job for the first time out. We had

a lot of guys going through that experience Saturday. So hopefully he can build on it. He didn't have it all figured yet. There are going to be some bumps in the road for him, too.

Q. Are you happy with the defensive line rotation?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. Saw some good things there. Guys responded well to it, and just I think most teams are better defensively, especially up front; if you can keep guys a little bit fresher. So that helps you if you've got that flexibility.

Q. Did you wonder where those bodies might come from? Sam Brinks stepped into a larger role.

COACH FERENTZ: In every phase of the program, he's been getting better and more mature and we really liked him out of high school. He had had an injury, I guess, and was a little bit undersized. He keeps getting better.

He doesn't draw attention to himself other than he's just so consistent with his plays. After awhile you start figuring out, hey, this guy is doing pretty well. He's coming along, and it helps when we keep everybody a little fresher. We're not the biggest group up front so always helps that way.

Q. What comes across in film or with the eyeballs in person, when you see these guys considered so-called undersized?

COACH FERENTZ: A couple things. Just the attitude they play with and the effort, and then you talk with the coaches that work with them, that type of thing. Try to get a feel for their intangibles and how much they love the game, all that type of thing.

And then you've got to see some growth potential. But we are not hung up on height. That's one thing we are not overly hung up on. We can't afford to be, so that's the No. 1 reason why. If all of our guys could look like Epenesa, we would take 20 of those guys but we don't get that luxury.

I think you just have to have an open mind and see things a little further down the road maybe, and the one thing we do consistently, and I'm sure everybody does this, we compare prospects to guys that have been successful.

You know, you think about a guy like Brady Reiff who wasn't the biggest guy coming out of high school, played tight end, defensive, I guess he was a linebacker, Karl Klug, you start comparing the guys we've had and maybe just try to see the good in people, and the prospects, the potential they may have to offer. But if they don't have the attitude that's going to help carry them and help work through those things,

you know, you're probably going to bark up the wrong tree that way.

Q. After you took a step back how did you feel Brian did in his first game as offensive coordinator?

COACH FERENTZ: I think a lot of good things certainly. I can't remember a game there wasn't a call you would like to have back or things you wouldn't do differently, that type of thing. I'm sure he feels the same way. I thought he did a good job. It wasn't exactly a smooth road for him. I think he worked through the bumps in the road. We never plan turnovers, and that obviously affects your thinking.

And then just over the course of the game, the flow of the game, certainly affected our play calling in the second half. You know it looked like we were playing pretty long defense and you don't want to put yourself in a position where you're going to give them an opportunity to maybe get back in it really easily.

Q. Hockenson played a lot in his debut, how does he complement Fant?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, really good start. Noah is still a young player in our minds. He's made some plays last year but he's really like a first-year guy, too, in a lot of ways. You're talking about a first year guy who is playing, a first-year starter, if you will. I think both those guys did a good job. The exciting part is those guys are going to improve a lot week-to-week-to-week, as long as they are working at it right and thinking right, which we assume they will do that.

Q. What can Noah add to his role as the season progresses?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's doing enough right now. We're asking him to do a lot of things. Have to give him a lot of credit, not a little. He's doing a great job in practice. We are working him pretty extensively. He's getting a lot of reps, and he gets tired but he keeps on going. He's done a good job. He's got a really good attitude and he's on the right track right now. So we're happy about that.

Q. With all the formations Brain used in Week 1, was there some self-scouting attributed to those decisions?

COACH FERENTZ: Either that or dumb luck; one of the two. We do keep track of stuff, actually, what we're doing.

Depending how games go, that certainly dictates some of that stuff. You're going to steer one way or the other depending on the circumstances you're in. Saturday, especially in the fourth quarter, we're not going to take any chances at that point. That would have been silly.

Q. Who is in charge of self-scouting?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've got a bunch of guys, I don't know what they are doing half the time quite frankly. But I do see all the charts and stuff and post-game reports and what have you.

We are watching all that stuff quarter-to-quarter, series-to-series. Because you know your opponents are doing the same thing. You're always watching what you're doing and trying to be mindful; so you're at least taking it where you want to take it. Doesn't always work but at least you're trying to steer it a little bit.

Q. Does it amaze you how much information is available compared to 20 years ago, is it almost information overload?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot of the stuff we were doing 20 years ago, too. I think everybody recalls plays, probably has some way of tracking and keeping track of that stuff. We've all as young guys done that, the grunt work, if you will, charting stuff and what have you. No different than basketball, the guy shoots in your circle and all the X's and O's.

The thing that's changed is the film many, the X's and O's technology, the film that we have available and the cutups we can make. If you're not careful, you can really paralyze yourself with a lot of stuff that really doesn't mean anything.

The trick is to know what's important and then focus on that. That's always been the trick and still is. We can just get it so much quicker now than you could, you know, 20 years ago, 15 years ago, and it's all because of video and digital, all that stuff.

Q. If they push the offensively what concerns you the most, the pressure on the line or the experience of your secondary?

COACH FERENTZ: They are a really good offensive football team. I would say they are very veteran. Their lack of experience, or least experience, is up front, and I thought they really played well the other night. They were in sync, they were together, they looked -- they are all on the same page and that's what good lines do. It jumps out at you.

And it's impressive because some of those guys haven't played as much as some of the other guys. They really did a nice job with their scheme. They are very comfortable with it and they have a veteran quarterback and the running back is not good, he's really good. That guy runs hard.

He's tough, and if there's a crack there he'll get it and it might be over here, it might be back there and he'll

make the cut and they stretch you, sideline-to-sideline, they will throw it down the field. I don't know what else is left. They are pretty good at what they do.

Q. Ed Cunningham strongly criticized you for your handling of C.J. Beathard at the Outback Bowl, do you have a response to that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, coincidentally we are actually going to issue a response after this press conference. I'll just say real quickly, the thing I found to rub me the wrong way in that article.

And I did read the article, he kind of lumped us in with another situation that occurred and there was absolutely no comparison between the two incidents. I got back to Leftwich's moment where they carried him down the field. They threw a touchdown.

C.J. Beathard's career at Iowa was defined by mental toughness, that's what that kid is all about in my mind. That's why I would have drafted him if I was an NFL personal guy. He's got extraordinary mental toughness, and couple that with an outstanding medical staff that we have here, our medical people aren't going to let a player be out there at risk where he could really do harm. That's just how it goes, and they have got final say, they always have, always will. I listen to them and then we work with players.

You as a coach make the judgment is a player is allowed to play; has been ruled eligible to play medically, and then you make the judgment, can he play, can he operate. And C.J. was clearly not at full strength, but he wasn't in 2015 either and played well.

And I listen to players, too, and C.J. wanted to be out there. That was my decision. You can second guess it. People can; Ed chose to. That's his prerogative, certainly, but I found it a little bit offensive quite frankly because he was not at risk medically and you know -- all off-season -- that's an interesting. That's his opinion. That's mine. I just stated mine.

Q. How do you think Miguel Recinos did?

COACH FERENTZ: He was excellent. He kicked off well to start with. That is important obviously. That's an important job.

And he looked really confident kicking the football, too, the place kicking part of it. Just really happy about that. That was a good start for him and hopefully he can gain a little confidence coming out of that.

Q. Was that hard for him, because Keith did nothing to lose the job, Miguel just got better?

COACH FERENTZ: We evaluate guys in practice and Keith obviously kicked a very, very big field goal last

year. He's got a big career ahead of him and Miguel has a lot of time left, too.

So we are going to let those guys both compete, and they may both play this year. That's very, very possible. And Duncs doing a good job on the practice field. Right now it's two guys that have been performing pretty well and it's hopefully a good situation for us.