

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Just before we get to this week's game, I want to look back for one second and thank our fans for helping create a phenomenal environment out in Kinnick Stadium last Saturday night. Like so many of the night games, it was a tremendous football game, and we really showed a national audience why Kinnick is such a special place to play. We are so appreciative of our fan support.

Obviously it was a tough, competitive, great football game. We felt bad to come up on the short end of it, but we woke up Sunday, went back to work, looked at the tape and we've moved on and certainly started our preparation for Michigan State in earnest yesterday. The thing about playing Michigan State, it's been a while over the years here, but pretty much one thing that doesn't change anytime you lineup against them, you know you're going to play a well-coached team, and a team that's got good players.

This one's no different. They're a physical football team. Very aggressive on defense, and the same thing offensively doing a good job there. They've got good players. They're physical players and it's going to be a big challenge from that standpoint.

Playing in the Big Ten on the road is always another challenge in itself. So we're going to have to have a great week of practice, going up to East Lansing, and most importantly, to be ready to compete at game time.

The game this past week was pretty hot. The game took a lot out of everybody. You kind of sense that, plus on top of it now with the new technology and Coach Doyle and his staff monitoring things, we've been sensitive to our players. Hopefully we'll do our best to alter practice where they can be ready to go 100 percent on Saturday, and give us a chance to go up there and play at our absolute best, and that's exactly what it will take to come out victorious.

Our captains this week are Josey Jewell, and congratulations to him on his honors. Well-deserved, certainly. James Daniels, Ben Niemann, and Kevin Ward; those four guys will be our captains this week, and I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Follow-up on the conference call with the player protests. Would you consider something along the

lines of linking arms during the anthem or something like that, or is that still too politically motivated, do you think?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think enough has already been said about this, quite frankly. There are kind of two levels. I read this this morning that sports and politics are intertwined. I see the world a lot differently, I guess. It's the beauty of sports, quite frankly. You go back to Saturday night and a bunch of fans had a chance to come to Kinnick Stadium, and life's always full of challenges and things that you maybe don't agree with or what have you, but it's a chance to be unified. Whatever team you're cheering for, hopefully you're into the game. I think as athletes and coaches, that is the beauty of it.

As I said on the teleconference, as you talk to people, former players, just about every one of them will mention, what they miss is just the camaraderie, the singleness of purpose, that type of thing. It's a really unique time in someone's life if you're an athlete. To me, that's the beauty of it all.

My preference is we keep politics to our individual time. That's how I look at it. Pertinent to our players, we work with college-aged students. Certainly we encourage them to grow, and be curious and ask questions. To me, that's healthy. As long as you're alive you should be doing that. But this is the one time we put everything aside. We all dress alike, act alike, and we're trying to do the same thing. Whatever they do on campus is great, as long as it's not illegal or immoral. I'm all for it.

But it's part of growing up and part of life in general. You're always looking at things and your perspective certainly changes as you get older. To me, that's on the outside and sports ought to be about sports. That's kind of how I look at the world, I guess. I always thought that was the beauty of sports, quite frankly.

Q. The other topic in the locker room, what have you heard over the years from teams and administrators coming in here about Iowa?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, well that's why I had a smirk or chuckle under my breath, I guess, when people talk about the color of our locker room because we have a great locker room. That's a great visitor's locker room, I would be thrilled to come here as a visitor. I wouldn't

have been so thrilled to come back to the one up above, the old one. But the home room locker room is the exact same.

Back in the day it was 1AA level football, a bus ride league, and you talk about bad locker rooms. That's part of football and part of games that's shifted in time. We really upgraded.

I went to Cleveland in 1993 and play at the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium, and they literally had hooks coming out of the wall. The same ones that Jim Brown as a rookie used. And the visitors was the same way, home and visitors were both lousy. You know, that's football. I don't know why it's a big conversation piece, but apparently it is. I heard that on the radio.

I get these little glimpses, about 12 minutes of news every morning when I come into work. Hear stuff and what the talk of the day might be.

Q. How can you get more consistency in the running game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's week to week. Big part of that is what your opponent's doing and then the plays that you run. Certainly just our offense in general, Saturday. We struggled in the first half up until the last play. That was pretty good. Second half was a whole different story. We came up with some offense and what have you. But typically it a game-to-game, situation-by-situation. We'll be working all season on making ourselves consistent and more consistent in all phases.

Q. Really interesting cat and mouse I thought with the offense and defense. They were working a ton. Is it hard to stay patient and stay in the moment and wait for that one play or to try to grind out that one play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, yeah, you'd rather sustain drives any day. Football is a lot more fun when you're clipping along five, six yards a pop. But that's not the nature. It goes game by game. Two things you have to realize is that first of all it is going to be different every week, typically, and sometimes it's different quarter to quarter, half to half, and that's part of football. Then the other thing is really what counts is how it turns out.

Statistics are really important. You would love to win time of possession, yards per play, all those kind of things. But it's all about finding a way to win. That's the ultimate goal. It's easier if you can be consistent and sustain. But it's not always competition, and the opponent has a lot to do with it sometimes.

Q. Does the way the Penn State defense blitzes,

does that change the way you do things moving forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: That was their personality. That was consistent with who they were coming in. That didn't catch us off guard at all. Most teams it's personalities, and every now and then you'll get somebody that will come with a side plan, but that's pretty consistent.

Q. We've talked over the years about Josey and how fast he plays. Can you talk a little about how much film study plays into his ability to play faster?

KIRK FERENTZ: If you go back through the years, most of our older guys would tell you that's what they learned in time is just how valuable that is. But all that being said, some things in football are just some guys do things a little bit better and they see things, they see more than other guys.

I'll go back to when I was in the NFL. Jonathan Ogden was a freak player physically, but you've heard about running backs that can see everybody on defense. I always felt like Ogden could. He could do things on film like how did he see that? How did he know to do that? So he had a vision like a great running back. I think some players just have that. You can improve that. Josey's had that knack and that inner drive. You can't measure at the combine those types of things. But there is something there. That's probably why we almost blew it in recruiting on him. We weren't seeing it. But when you get on the field with the guys, sometimes you just, boy, those guys he's going a little quicker than maybe he should be. So what is it about him that enables him to see that and Josey's got that factor to him.

Q. When you get a recruit here, and you get them from all walks and some of them are very sophisticated. Do you teach the guys how to watch film?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you try. Absolutely. In today's world, talking about today's world, it's a whole different world. These guys have the huddle and all that stuff in high school that nobody had. Back in the day it was 16 millimeter, 8 millimeter. They're all watching film now. They like watching their own highlights a lot of times. I learned that. Who wouldn't if you're a good player.

But there is an art to it, certainly, and what are the tips that you can pick up, that type of thing. So they get that hopefully in the meetings and they can carry it to their own film study. Our guys have iPads with video, which I'm sure just about everybody in the country does now. But there is still something unique about sitting in the room with your teammates. Coaches are -- it's better if the coach is in there. But when the team gets in there, they sit there and talk to each other,

teach each other. That's a good thing. When you get that going, you're in business.

Q. You have a lot of guys from the last two recruiting classes on your depth chart right now. Just a coincidence?

KIRK FERENTZ: We really feel like we've done a good job the last two years in particular. The guys that are here right now have really fit well. You know recruiting is such a projection, so you always hope and think that you're doing the right thing, but you never know until you get them on campus, and they've really got to be here four to six months before you start to get a feel if it was a good match, that type of thing. Then hopefully you see some growth as you go along. But if the match is good, typically you see the growth.

But, yeah, I think we feel good about the last two groups. Some guys are going a little faster than others, but for the most part, we feel like the guys are on the right track, and we do have the bottom part of our roster is pretty strong right now.

Q. You look at the offensive line and last year made incredible strides. This year the numbers aren't probably where you want them to be. Is it not enough chemistry?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yeah, it doesn't help, back to your point. Having Daniels not play the first game didn't help us at all, so you're shifting. When you shift one guy, then Ike goes down.

You know, Ike's a good player. Obviously a veteran player, a leader. So every dent. We're the kind of team that we are impacted by everything, which most teams are. There are certainly elite teams that have guys say this guy's out and might be a better guy coming in for him. But we typically don't have that situation at any position. So every little dent hurts your football team. You have to work through it, try to adjust and hope the other guys catch up fast. That's kind of what goes on.

But, again, it's a 12-week race, 13 weeks, but 12-game race. I don't get too worried about statistics overall this time of year, other than turnovers. We're finally even. That's a good thing. That was a big concern. Hopefully the worst is behind us, but there are no guarantees there. There are certain things that you watch at this point in the year. But we're still so early in the season that stats don't mean a whole lot right now.

Q. This is a physical, aggressive defense, it always has been. I don't think much has changed identity wise?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, they are who they are.

Q. Are you expecting some of the blitzing? Penn

State seemed to attack the line of scrimmage?

KIRK FERENTZ: These guys have a much different package than the one we saw last week. Penn State is who they are. Michigan State certainly has an identity. It's worked pretty well for them. My guess is when they threw our stuff on, it probably didn't look a lot different to them and vice versa. The players have changed. There aren't many guys left from the last time we played on either side of the ball for either team. But we kind of look like each other.

Ever since Coach Dantonio got there, they've had a certain way they do things and it's been really successful for them.

Q. From an emotional standpoint, was the last time you played Michigan State as gut-wrenching as anything you've gone through?

KIRK FERENTZ: It was a tough loss. There was a lot at stake there that day, needless to say, for both teams. We were both at the last stop in terms of conference play. So that was tough. You know, but the other night was tough too. When you lose on the last play and basically both games that wasn't exactly the last play in Indy.

Funny, Steve and I were just walking out here talking about that game in particular, and I said it feels like it was ten years ago. It literally does. It's so far back. That one's ancient history. Really Saturday night is kind of the same way at this point. We've got to move on and worry about what's in front of us. It's a big challenge.

Q. Does it feel like defenses with Akrum's reputation and what he can do, and Stanley still growing that they're going to want to try make Nate take it to the air?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, you can take that approach and tie it in with the blitzes. Ironically our last two touchdowns, I guess we only had two, Saturday were both off the blitz. There is a little risk-reward on that stuff. The pass that Akrum took the distance, that was on the blitz, so if you're not careful, he might just pop through there and get in open space. That's a dangerous thing for a defense. The run was a run that popped away from the blitz also, so it puts a little stress on you.

That's one thing about him. He's that kind of player, and he can stress a defense. So you have to weigh and measure what you do, and that is what every defensive coach does anyway. But that's why it's so good to have a guy like him who can hit a home run. That really gives you a different sense of things.

I'll say this about Nate. He hasn't played perfect.

Obviously, nobody has. But that throw he made right at the end of the half was pretty good. He knew where he was going, and he made a really good throw, and Nick made a good play on that. Same thing on the touchdown to Akrum, he knew what was going on. He knew where to go. So he's done a really nice job for four games into it. We're really pleased.

Not that there is not a lot of room to go through. But think about going on the road a couple weeks ago and what he did, and playing in what I would call a marquis environment and playing the way he did, he'll continue to grow.

Q. Would it surprise you that Akrum said that was probably his worst game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. He wants to get better. He made a couple of really big plays, but we have to get more consistent. That's the target there, and he's part of that. But he also was a big part of giving us a chance to win the football game too, which was really commendable.

Q. That fumble he had, you saw him look down right after that. Did you say anything to him?

KIRK FERENTZ: Everybody was just like, let's get back up. We're all so far removed from that. Four years ago, he was reckless, not careless. I'll start there. He's in the zone now. He's paying attention to things. That was not a matter of him being reckless or careless. If that's the case, that's an issue. But I think he's certainly graduated out of that realm.

Q. What was your vantage point in that 2015 game, the last play? I don't think I've seen two teams grind as hard for one single play maybe? At one point it looked like Desmond King had him down at the three.

KIRK FERENTZ: I got in trouble for saying this three years ago, but that's football. It's two teams competing like hell out there. They're going after it. They had that much more than we had right there at the end. I've said it before, it was interesting in that regard. We went undefeated up until that point and got more compliments about our effort that night than any of the 12 wins.

So for me, ultimately, and that's what this game gets down to at the end of the day, what are you giving of yourself? What commitment do you make? What do you give of yourself out on the field for your team? And that night that was two teams that gave it all. We've been on the short end of two of those now since we're on the topic. But there is nothing fun about that.

You walk away, and you can always say this play, that play, but it's about what you lay out there. If you lay it

out there, that's what you learn from this sport, quite frankly. Hopefully that can carry out there and do some good in the world. Give of yourself a little bit, and think about everybody, and you're not at the epicenter of the whole world and all that Jazz. It's about being part of something significant where everybody's involved in a positive way.

Q. Does it kind of compound the feeling that there was no game to jump to the next weekend?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, it stunk. Whatever. At the end of the season it's always worse because you have time to think about it. Like this week, we don't have time. So that thing is in a closet somewhere. We'll go back and revisit it somewhere in another season, but right now we have to worry about this game coming up.

Q. You've had to go through a lot of high moments and lows and had to bounce back one way or the other. But that seemed unique in that your players were completely devastated in that game versus some of the other weeks. Then you add that, oh, yeah, we're going to the Rose Bowl, but nobody seemed to be jumping for joy the next day.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, because you don't have a next week, so that makes a big difference. Where we stand today, you know, we all knew -- nobody knows when the times are. That's college football. You never know what's going to happen there. But we knew our 12-game schedule.

The other thing you know going into a season is you have 12 games. You also know you might be really happy, you might be sad, and you might be somewhere in between every Saturday night. But facts are, you've got to go back to work on Sunday. You've got to clean some stuff up. You've got to try to flip the page and move on to your opponent. If you can't handle that emotionally, you probably should get out of the sport. You probably won't last long. That's kind of the way it goes.

Q. How do you view football? Do you see it as something different than most ventures in this life?

KIRK FERENTZ: I do. That's why I have chosen to stay with it. We all have choices coming out of college. But it flipped my switch, obviously. I think what's unique about it is unlike any other team sport, we've got a lot of people involved here so to me the beauty of football is being able to put large groups of people from all kinds of backgrounds, all that stuff, really. Race, religion, socioeconomic, and we're all here to do one thing together, and that's pretty neat, I think.

So when you get in a good spot and everybody's moving in the same direction, it's a really great feeling, great sensation. The highs and lows, you'd rather have

the highs, but that's what makes it so unique, the low's are low. You know? It's very unique.

I'm not trying to minimize baseball or any other sport or individual sports. Zach Johnson's got a team of people that he works with, and they're really all together on something. So there is not a lot left in life, I think, where people can really bond and put everything aside and be focused on something together for a brief period. And I'm not talking about 24 hours a day, but I'm talking about windows of time where we're all trying to do things the same way, and be together and help each other out on one cause.

Q. If somebody felt strongly enough that they had to make a political statement during the season, would you support them?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'd ask them to do it on their own time, probably. Use a platform where maybe it could make a difference. Here's the way I look at it too, name anybody that's against or in favor of social injustice? Like anybody? Who is in favor of cancer? Who is in favor of all these things that are out there? I can't imagine there is anybody in favor of dumb stuff.

So go do something that could really make a difference? Go do community service. Go to an activist rally. Go listen to candidates talk when it's political season. I've got my blue shirt and red tie on speaking of politics and primaries and all that stuff. But go listen and find out what candidates are really about, and go vote. Go vote.

If you really want to do something, do something. But some things are just way too easy. I think in a lot of cases people just kind of follow the crowd. I think it happens way too much sometimes. I'm not accusing anybody in this moment of time of doing that, but it's just kind of been history. Use your own mind.

Q. Do you gauge how your players learn? I know that so much is thrown at them these days and video and actual demonstration. Do you gauge that stuff?

KIRK FERENTZ: Sure, we try too. I don't know how scientific we are or whatever, but everybody learns differently. Any parent would tell you that. You find out, but visual is obviously, we're kind of moving in that trend certainly. But I'm old school enough to believe that repetition is still really valuable, and I would say visual is a big, big part of learning. Certainly it is in football.

I think clichés are true. Pictures say a thousand words. When guys see things on the screen, whether it's their performance or somebody else's, I think they can learn from that a lot better than they do from hearing it. You

show people and teach them and all that. But visual reinforcement is really good.

Q. Did you ever picture back in the day where you would be measuring how guys learn? Where that's a real factor where you can go get a player?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think you try to do that. In recruiting, when you get them on campus you're always trying to learn what makes this guy, what makes it register with him and what doesn't? Writing things down can help a lot. Yeah, for what we do, I remember getting ripped by Joe Moore, 1996 or '97 because I wasn't using a telestrator like they do on TV. But what a teaching device that is. Just to draw the lines up there on that video, it's a powerful, and he was right.

He was good at ripping me about a lot of stuff. But he was right on that one. That was probably, I was in my 40s probably at that point. You're always learning how to teach.

Q. How do you feel about your punting?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's been hot and cold. Some good, some bad. Overall productivity has been pretty good. I'd like to see more consistency there for sure. When he hits them well, he really hits them well. His rugby punt has been good, placement has been pretty good for the most part. So I think we're doing okay.

But it's like a lot of places on our team right now. We have a lot of growth. A lot of areas of our football team. Colton's a young guy. He's played four games now too. Something we are all counting on, and it's got to happen if we're a good football team. All the guys that haven't played a lot, they've got room to really grow and improve dramatically whereas the older guys, it's not going to be as dramatic or significant.

But it's all got to go together if we're going to have a good team. That's got to be part of it.

Q. I'm curious, is there a punter competition?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's doing a good job. He's doing a good job. It's not out of the realm of possibilities that he'll play this year, but we haven't put him in a game yet. It's like every position, we'll just keep weighing it and see how it goes. But I think Colton's getting better.

Q. What about Toks? Last year he burned a red-shirt to play. Looks like he's probably fifth in line at this point. Are you thinking about red-shirting him at all this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he hasn't been on the field yet for a reason. We'll be smart about that and be prudent. But also with James getting injured, that certainly affects things a little bit. So we'll take it week by week. But Toks has to stay ready right now. It's a possibility.

Q. Same with Keith Duncan?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's possible, for sure.

Q. James still on track for returning after the bye?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. He's still in a brace and really can't do anything. He's still got swelling in there and all that, so we'll see.

Q. Brandon Snyder started back to practice yet?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's doing more and more with each week. I don't know when it's going to be, but I think it's fair to say he'll get out there on the field this season in the regular season. His rehab is going really well. It's quote/unquote ahead of normal times or average times, so that's a positive. He seems to have confidence right now.

But he'll dress out this weekend, but he's not going to play. He won't have a helmet, but he'll go through pregame and stuff like that, but one of these days maybe we'll get him out there.