

Big Ten Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 28, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, great to be here. Just want to express my thanks to Commissioner Petitti, Big Ten staff, all of you for covering this event this week. Certainly a big thing.

I just mentioned, it's my 27th Big Ten Media Day, 28th preseason overall. Certainly a lot of things have changed, but there's a lot that's stayed the same as well.

A lot of conversation, especially the last couple years, about the business of college football. Rightfully so. But I think the good thing about all this for all of us is it kind of signifies the start of us transitioning into pure football, just being with our team in a football environment.

That's really what we look forward to.

Couple weeks back, the biological clock kicks in, you start feeling anxious, nervous Big Ten anticipation of the season, trying to be ready, make sure we're prepared and ready to give our best in a pretty competitive environment.

Still the best thing overall is working with great, great people. That hasn't changed my time at Iowa, even going back to 1981. The people in our building, we got a great coaching staff, tremendous support staff, and most of all our players going back to '81 have been fantastic to work with. That really hasn't changed. They love the game for the right reasons.

The other part is the thing that makes football so unique is the valuing of the teamwork, the aspect of teamwork, the role it plays in building a successful team.

About our team specifically, we started back January 20th, our first day of class at Iowa. That was the first time we came together. Obviously had a few add-ons in June, 11 high school players joined us then.

Our year, typically our traditionally, I've had a pretty high retention rate. This year is really no different. But the big difference was we had a big senior class and a couple guys that left, so we brought in roughly 30 newcomers at

midterm back in January, half being transfers, half of them being first-year high school players coming in starting college.

All but one of the transfers was an underclassman. So one senior in the group, then everybody younger. I bring that up in it's been a good learning process for us the last seven-plus months of the team really learning about the program, what we're trying to get accomplished.

Just happy to say the effort has been good. It's been a group that's really been attentive and they've been responsive. With every phase that we go through, I think we've seen growth in terms of the cohesiveness and our leadership base. Those are all key things if you're going to have a good certain. Certainly so far so good.

Personnel-wise, teamwork-wise, first question obviously is going to be the quarterback position. Bottom line is this: right now we don't know the answer. I can only tell you we'll know the answer when we know it. Hopefully sometime in August that will become apparent. It may be in-season. Can't rule out any possibilities.

The bottom line is we don't really know who our starter is at this point, but are really pleased with the guys that are competing and the growth they've shown in the program now a year-plus. That part's good.

I think our skill positions outside of the quarterback position, we're relatively experienced, feel pretty good there. The offensive line, we graduated three really good players, but I think we've got a pool right now of seven, eight guys, maybe nine, that have a chance to play significant reps right now. Just not sure where they're going to end up, what positions. We'll figure that out as we go along.

Defensively, if you work from the back end up, back end I think we have a lot of good candidates competing. Really unsure who the starting four or five will be. The linebacker position kind of similar. Jayden Montgomery is back, obviously. But then we have a bunch of guys that have been with us that we expect to play really well for us this coming year.



Our biggest area of focus and concern will be the defensive line. Seven of our top eight guys from a year ago are gone. Anxious to see how that goes. A lot of growth in the spring, expect to see more in August.

The one thing I will say there, I can just foresee us probably rotating players on a more frequent basis than maybe we have the last couple years. Don't envision anybody playing 500 snaps this season. We'll let all that shake out.

Probably the most significant portion of our football team that is going to bear watch, our special teams phase, point being there that we lost every specialist that we had. We lost our placekicker. Certainly had a great career, Drew Stevens, did an unbelievable job. We lost our deep snapper, is gone. Have a new punter. Contention there, a battle going for that position. Then Kaden Wetjen is the best return guy I've ever been around in my career. He graduated, too.

Some of the advantages we gained through special teams over the last couple years, we're going to have to ride the train a little bit this year and exhibit some patience. The new specialists, there's always going to be a little bit of an up-and-down factor. At least that's been my experience. That's an area we're keeping our focus on as well.

A couple things here. Obviously our program, I think it's imperative, for us to be successful, we have to really do a good job of handling each phase. Our players hear that a lot from me. So far they've done a good job each step of the way.

Right now the only thing that matters is what we do in the month of August. Camp starts soon. That's paramount at this stage. Certainly looking forward to this season. The last five years a lot of change and variables in college football. Wouldn't want to venture a guess where it's all going. Right now what happens between now and December is pretty much laid out. That's where our focus is.

Honored to be at Iowa, looking forward to another season, looking forward to another highly competitive season. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. The commissioner was up there earlier talking about in favor of the Playoffs expanding to 24 teams. With you being the longest-tenured coach in the FBS, can you talk about how potential expansion can benefit a place like Iowa?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll go back from when they went from

two to four. My feeling then was if you go to four, you may as well go bigger number at that stage. To me just having two teams play for it, there were some subjectivity there obviously. Revenue opportunity, all that stuff that comes with Playoffs.

When we went to four, it really kind of minimized or started to cheapen some of the bowl experiences, more players opting out, that type of thing. Silly me, I thought playing in Orange Bowl, the Rose Bowl, whatever, was a big deal. That attitude started to grow with that.

My attitude is, if we're going to go to two to four, I'd go bigger. 16 or 24, I'm in favor of 24 certainly. The other part of our story is our focus needs to be on some other issues that are bigger to college football right now than the Playoff discussion.

Totally in favor of 24, to answer the question. I think it benefits everybody, not just a school like ours.

Q. I wanted to ask about bringing in Tom Moore over the off-season as a senior consultant to yourself and offensive adviser. What does it bring to help you and this team continue to evolve?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just wisdom and experience. You can't put a price tag on that sometimes.

Tom is an amazing person. Played at Iowa. Never started a game as a quarterback. That was his position. But found a way to help the team as a kicker and a punter. But he's got such an appreciation for his experience, and that's a few years ago, late '50s, 1960. He has an appreciation for the game of football and the people involved.

He stands for me all that's good in football.

As far as a coach goes, one of the beauties of Tom is his wisdom is extensive, but his clarity and ability to cut to concise points that really matter. He has an innate ability to do that. To have him with us, it's a benefit for everybody in our building. Everybody in our coaching staff, I'll start with me, but everybody has benefited from it. Our players as well. They gravitate towards him, want to ask him questions. To have his experience available to everybody, I feel very fortunate to have that.

Plus I wanted to get somebody in the building older than me (smiling).

Q. You mentioned the personnel that you're losing on special teams. How do you expect to make up for the loss of special teams coordinator LeVar Woods?



KIRK FERENTZ: I'll go back. When we started 28 years ago, our first building block was strength and conditioning. Second thing was special teams. Lester Erb at that time was our coordinator. We've had a real strong tradition. LeVar did a great job.

Every guy that has handled the special teams has done a great job. We have made a commitment to it as a program. A lot of people talk about things, but we actually commit meeting time to it, practice time. Every guy, if you look back historically, you think about Bob Sanders, Dallas Clark, two of our best players ever, obviously two of our best players in the early years, they cut their teeth on special teams. That's how they became notable players.

When they were veteran guys, they were fighting us to get on special teams. Greenway, the same thing, Abdul Hodge. It's just been part of our DNA, if you will.

Fast forward to LeVar, he had coached other positions -- linebackers, tight ends. That's when the NCAA allowed our staff to expand, everybody's staff to expand. We could specify and have a sole special teams coach, and LeVar is the first one that we've had. Did a great job.

I'm very confident Chris Polizzi has a similar background. He's been a coordinator, defensive coordinator for many years. Been in front of room, knows how to organize things. We're not changing the playbook. It's more about the players. It always has been, in my mind. I think what we've done has been solid in all three phases over the years. It's about the players and their stories, how they develop.

I'll go back to Drew Stevens. Nobody was worse his first spring power or five years ago. That fall he did a great job. I never would have predicted it around the spring.

That's the fun part, who is going to emerge and do a great job.

Q. You stated previously how you've seen the changes throughout college football, the change in the Playoffs, transfer portal, introduction of NIL. What are your thoughts on the current state of college football?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm concerned. I'm concerned. To me that's our single biggest issue right now. I kind of prefer to work with boundaries with a system, a system in place. Spent six years in the NFL. I really don't have any aspirations of ever going back there, haven't since I left.

I've enjoyed every job I've ever had. But two things are really appreciate about the NFL: contracts are contracts, they mean something, and there's a salary cap. In the

NFL, another thing is equal enforcement. All rules get enforced the same ways, 32 teams. You have 32 teams operating in the same system, same set of circumstances and rules. It really gets down to the players and the coaches. Imagine that.

The more we can move in that direction, I'm old enough to remember the '70s, I'll give you a quick -- pick an easy one. When I got to Iowa in '81, we went to the Rose Bowl first time in 19 years, had a winning season. First time in 13 years that someone other than two teams have been to the Rose Bowl. I would suggest the Big Ten has been healthier since 1981 than it was during the '70s. That's just me as a participant, that's how I look at it.

I think if we're not careful, we could go down that road again as a bigger enterprise, college football.

Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports