

Outback Bowl: Mississippi State vs Iowa

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Kirk Ferentz

Iowa Hawkeyes

Iowa 27 - Mississippi State 22

BRETT PATTERSON, OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS: On behalf of Outback Steakhouse and the Outback Bowl we want to welcome all the Iowa fans and both teams for participating this year and coming down to Tampa. Our families enjoyed hosting them at our restaurants and just an incredible game today and would like to thank Coach Ferentz and the Hawkeyes for putting on quite a display out there today.

Coach Ferentz?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: First, I want to say Happy New Year. It's great to be playing football on New Year's, I can tell you that.

We came into this game knowing Mississippi State was a very tough, talented and veteran team. They have been that way, really, from the start of the season, so we knew this would be a really tough, hard-fought game and it would take our best effort and that's what it really boiled down to.

I think our guys did a great job preparing starting back in early December. It's always tricky to get ready for a Bowl game, and you're always trying to search for the right formula but the bottom line is, players have to be attentive and they have to work hard, and our guys certainly did that.

I think as much as anything, they played together today, and they certainly were, you know, relentless out there and resilient, and they had to be against this opponent.

So bottom line is I just think we played tough football. We played clean football and we played smart football, and played, you know, team football, opportunistic football. For us to win, that's what it requires.

Just really pleased for our seniors as much as anything. Our team, certainly happy for them but our seniors, to go out with another good season, finished up with nine wins, four trophies this year and should be a top 20 football team, that's something they can be very, very proud of. You know, very, very happy about



that.

And then the last thing, just I'll throw this in. My sixth trip, personally, a lot of us on our staff and with our program, six trips down here, and you know, it's always a different challenge. The weather might be a little different, all those types of things, the hotels flipping back and forth, but the consistent thing is just the way our team gets treated. It's just first class.

Jim McVay, everybody involved, the Outback folks do a wonderful job throwing a Bowl game and making it a great experience, most of all for the players and that's what it should be. We're thrilled to be back here and everything's been first class.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. What impressed us the most was the ability of your secondary -- did that surprise you?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. I mean, we hoped we would play that way and play fundamentally sound because they can hurt you in a lot of different ways.

We saw that, and I thought our guys for the most part, we missed a few today and it starts with their quarterback. He's a tremendous competitor, tremendous player, but for the most part I think we played pretty fundamentally sound out there.

Q. When you look at two of the bigger players for you today, Nick and Jake Gervase, both walk-on guys, worked their way into the lineup and they came up with the biggest plays. What does that say about them as people and the program?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's illustrative of how we're built. We have other guys highly recruited and other guys that worked their way and proven that they deserve to play at this level and it's all about being given an opportunity.

The work is done by the players. Nick is a great illustration of that, and you know, Jake, the same way. He wanted an opportunity, came and went to work like everybody else.

Our deal is, you know, if you're on our team, you're on our team. Everybody gets coached the same way, and

everybody gets the same opportunity to grow and improve. And for us improvement and growth is so critical if we're going to have a successful team.

Q. What did you guys see on that Nick Easley's 75-yard touchdown?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yeah, you probably noticed they are pretty aggressive on defense, and that first quarter continued to be more aggressive. You know, there were a couple of different guys that could have gotten the ball and Nick popped open and just a great job and that certainly gave us the spark that we really needed at that point.

Q. What did you see when Nick came on the radar? What did you see in him?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: You know, ironically, first time I talked to Nick, I was in the same room I slept in the last six nights. And I never met Nick, didn't know much about him. Tyler Barnes had put us in touch with each other, and just you know, asked if he'd be interested in being a Hawkeye.

He was heading to another school at that point and I'm sure glad he kept an open mind. He gave us an opportunity to talk and visit a little bit, and he came and joined our program.

So we're so, so thrilled about it. Sometimes dumb luck is a really good thing in recruiting and that's really the essence of that whole thing.

Q. You turned the ball over two times, but no panic in the offense?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, if you can read my mind or look at my stomach internally, it would be a whole different deal. That's the worst possible thing we could have done obviously and those were two ugly plays, quite frankly.

You know it looked like we were starting to get a little momentum. We took momentum at the end of the half. We were doing some really good things and couldn't have gone any worse, but that's where I think the resilience of our football team really showed.

The offensive guys kept playing and they stayed with it and then most importantly the defense really bailed us out and made some good plays and even before the first half, you know, we threw a pass on our first -- last possession, first we threw a pass and then, you know, we should have run the ball twice and that was my fault for not doing that.

So we gave them the ball back with two time-outs, but the defense bailed us out but that's team football. The last time we played, it was a little different story. We

won the game, but we won it in a different game and that's team football.

Q. How important is it to go into the spring with a win in a bowl game?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's no downside to winning, regardless, that I'm aware of. You know, it doesn't hurt us at all but most importantly, to me, I think we were all focused -- sending our 14 seniors out on a really good note and that was important today.

We're proud to win this game. Came hard like it's supposed to, and sure, we're going to enjoy it tonight. We're going to enjoy Tampa a little bit.

Q. How does a player like Gervase get into the position he is in?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It is hard work. He's a guy who is very productive at Assumption High School and did a lot of really good things for his team there.

You know, you go right down the list of guys that we've had like that, but they come in, they work hard, take advantage of the strength and conditioning program. They take advantage of the coaching that they are able to get, and you know, but they do the hard work. They are the ones out there doing the listing, the day after day work that it takes to become really good, and a big part of that is mental.

You know, it's one thing to be talented and athletic and all that but you've got to understand how to play, what the values are and you know, it gets pretty deep.

But it's like Nick, you know, if a guy wants to take advantage of that, they have got an opportunity, and we're -- you know, it's helped make us a good football team.

Q. What did the constant pressure from A.J. (Epenesa) do today?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It was huge. It was absolutely huge. We couldn't run the ball. We had a hard time blocking their front and felt like we were playing LSU again after the '04 season. I really felt that way.

But conversely, they had a hard time with their protection. Our guys kept digging up there and kept working. Factored in on turnovers, but also just field position, all those things. That was really important.

Q. Did you come into the game thinking takeaways would be almost mandatory to win today?

HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Again, we're looking at their team. They are extremely talented. They have a

lot of good players and they are very well-coached, and they are veteran. I mean, they came into the season veteran. I know we're 13 games into it now, but they came into it veteran and they have got some guys that can play, flat-out play.

So we were going to have to find a way no matter what it was -- find a way to be victorious, and that's the essence of team football.

Then the other part about it, you watch Bowl games, Bowl games are a lot like early season games where penalties, turnovers really factor in. Special teams really factor in. So if you aren't on top of that part of your game because you haven't played in a while, it can be a really tough thing.

Obviously, it helped us today being a little bit more opportunistic.