

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



Appreciate that, Commissioner, and great to have Commissioner Warren in the conference.

Good morning to everybody and certainly outstanding to be in person, even better to be in a football environment like this. So kudos to the Big Ten for setting this up.

This is my 23rd media outing now. Since I've been at Iowa, I guess 22, technically. Last year was a little bit of a blip in the radar. But certainly seen a lot of changes during those 23 years and then also a lot of things really haven't changed. As far as our approach at Iowa, not much has changed. We have always been focused on trying to assist our student-athletes being successful in the classroom, hope that they have a great career football-wise, maximize all their abilities. I think most importantly just try to help prepare them for their adult lives and I think that's one great thing about college football. It really is a great vehicle to do that.

Also every year basically goes back to January. We all start new. It's a new season, new year calendar-wise, and a new team, and it's a real opportunity for all of us to be involved with great young people, opportunity to help them grow, develop and learn, ultimately get prepared to compete in an outstanding conference like the Big Ten. It's just a real thrill. It's a great honor to be a part of that.

I think the other aspect about it, obviously, it's like every year, especially at this time of year, there's a real mix of excitement for all of us and I think also uncertainty and that will never change.

Regarding our team, obviously just looking forward to getting started with them, looking forward to pre-season practice, when that goes, and all of us want to know the answers right now. None of us do. I don't know how good we'll be this year, but I can say I really like our football team. I like the people on it. I like the way they have trained, the way they have worked going back to January, and the attitude that they have displayed on a really consistent basis. So happy about that. And I think like most seasons, team-wise, we have a mix of veterans, good

solid veterans, guys that have played and had success out there on the field and in conference competition, got a good mix of youth as well. Like most years for us at Iowa we're always concerned about our depth and that's something we'll really be focused on basically at every position when we start up in August.

And I really think that's the beauty of college football. I think it's why there are so many great stories in college football. We all have had an opportunity to see how we can improve and grow as we go along.

So last, in a nutshell, I think if you want to look at our football team, really a prominent focus for us as a coaching staff, certainly our fan base, development of starters up front on both sides of the football. We lost a lot of really good starting players the last two years on both sides of the line of scrimmage, so we got a lot of work to do there. Then.

Obviously right along with that a lot of work to develop depth at those positions. I think we're fairly experienced on the perimeter. If we were playing seven on seven we would be in pretty good shape, but obviously there's a lot more to that. And then on, like most years, I think we really got a pretty good feel of who our specialists are and what we can count on them to do and I think they're all capable of performing really well. So happy about that.

So again, as I said, I just really like our team. It's been good to watch them over the course of the summer. It's been good for everybody to have a break and maybe another break coming up here before we get going. I think we're all eager to start up here in 13 days, obviously. And like every year, August is a big, big month, not only to prepare for the season, prepare to be game-ready, but just to continue to try to develop our team and see if we can't move forward. And we are fairly young team, as really evidenced in the spring, so there's a great opportunity for us to show growth if we handle things right.

The last couple things here real quickly. It's unique this year for us to open up with a Big Ten scheduled opponent. That is unique. I know last year was an exception for all of us, but I think you have to go back, I believe to 1979, 1980



when Coach Fry was just getting started, I know they played Indiana, ironically, in '79. So we open with Indiana this year. It's something very different for us.

And then the next week we play another team that's going to be nationally ranked, so we have two nationally ranked teams right off the bat. So that's certainly something that's got our attention. We know we're going to have to be at our best right off the bat or at least attempt to be.

And then the other obvious thing just to be back in Kinnick with fans, and I think that's one thing we all missed last year. One of my most vivid memories of the season was pulling up for our first game in West Lafayette and nobody was on the sidewalks, just how bizarre that was, how surreal it was, kind of like a science fiction movie. And I think it was even stranger for all of us to play at home in front of, without our crowds being there.

So I know we feel that way. I'm sure every coach that stands in front of you feels the same way too. It's going to be great to get started with Big Ten football and it's going to be great to have fans involved. So I'll end it there and throw it out for questions.

Q. I've known Jim. Jim's been a close friend of mine for a long time, watched all his kids play football. Of course his son Luke is one of your tight ends. So how is Luke doing and will he play much this fall?

KIRK FERENTZ: Luke's a tremendous young man, first and foremost, despite his genetics. He overcame -- I'm joking. Jim was a tremendous football player and just a tremendous person. They have got a great family. But Luke's a guy we're really excited about in recruiting and now after having him on campus we're even more excited. He's done a great job. He's a young guy who is really developing quickly and he plays a position, speaking of depth, where we don't have a lot of depth, which we will likely have a really quality tight end in Sam Laporta. But yeah, Luke's got great opportunity in front of him and we're really counting on him to help our football team this year.

Q. Your last three multi-year starters at center all started games in the NFL last year. You brought Tyler Linderbaum to Big Ten media days. How does he stack up with them physically and does he have NFL potential?

KIRK FERENTZ: I got to think about who the last three guys were. I don't know. But, yeah, we have been very fortunate. Even going back, I think about Bruce Nelson most prominently being a three- or four-year starter for us, not all at center, but kind of got that string going.

It's critical position I think for most teams and certainly in our, with our philosophy, we really believe you want somebody in there who really is capable of doing a lot of things besides blocking well. I don't know if it gets any better than Tyler. He's just a tremendous young person, first and foremost. We were so excited about recruiting him and fortunately for us he was 15 miles up the road and had a connection that way, but three-sport athlete, tremendous student, just has a lot of pride in everything he does and it shows in the way he practices. But then beyond that, the impact he has on his teammates, especially his linemates, and so we feel so fortunate that he's our center right now. He's a great team leader. I think an outstanding football player and there's an awful lot of them in this conference and he joins that list. So it's just great to have him. It's like baseball, it's really helpful to be strong up the middle.

Q. With the news of the week being Oklahoma and Texas kind of pushing to join the SEC potentially, as the longest tenured coach in college football, I guess, kind of what thoughts are racing through your mind on that topic?

KIRK FERENTZ: I flash back to the early '90s, actually, Kevin White, who has retired now from Duke, a long standing tremendous athletic director. Kevin was a man that hired me up at the University of Maine and I remember him talking about the impact of television, conference realignment, all these things and, I mean, he was talking about calculus 3 and I was in algebra 1 basically, so I had no idea what he was talking about and now we're seeing it and we have seen it through the years, just all the changes that are going on in college football and have gone on.

So again, nobody's got a crystal ball and that just popped out of mid air, whatever, two days ago, I guess. Right now I'm really not too focused on that. I'm just kind of thinking about August and our football team. But again, just from experience, nothing -- you know, never say never to anything right now in college football or whatever's going to happen in the future, for sure.

Q. Spencer Petras, year one, what did you see from him and just the value of having a returning quarterback particularly with a tough early season schedule like you're going to have?

KIRK FERENTZ: Appreciate that question. Historically, the last 23 years, we have had a lot of success with first year starters, I think back to Brad Banks in 2002, Nathan Chandler the next year, and then Drew Tate the following year. So we have been very fortunate in that regard. And I think the big difference between Spencer taking over as a first-year player versus those guys or anybody else since

that time, Spencer wasn't afforded the luxury of going through a spring practice as our starter or our normal pre-season practice in the month of August. So I thought he did remarkably well considering the obstacles that he had to overcome. And me, personally, I thought that his highest, the best game I saw him play or the most gratifying game as a coach was at Illinois, where he probably couldn't have played much more poorly in the first half and really put us behind the eight ball and then came back in the second half and played just tremendously well. I think that was a great learning experience for him and I think it also was very revealing in terms of how he's wired and how he's built. He's a really resilient guy, tough-minded guy, extremely conscientious. So as a coach when you see things like that, it really makes you feel, gains some confidence. And I, as a coach, we give witness to just how committed he is to, not only him being a good football player and being totally ready, but how committed he is to helping his teammates and being team-oriented. And so I continue to be really impressed with him, but like everybody else he'll be competing in August and it's going to be fun to watch that competition. But we all feel really good about him and have great confidence in Spencer.

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