

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KEVIN WARREN: Our next coach to the podium is the longest tenured Big Ten football head coach, an incredible coach and human being. He and his wife, Mary, do so many things in Iowa and especially at the Children's Hospital.

Coach Ferentz had a great year last year, won the West division, and will have a great season this year. Again, welcome to the podium head football coach at the University of Iowa, Kirk Ferentz.

KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon to everybody. Good morning, I should say. Appreciate everyone's interest in our program, certainly the Big Ten and college football overall.

I feel really fortunate and thankful to be starting my 33rd year at Iowa. I was a nine-year assistant back in the '80s, and starting my 24th year as a head coach now.

I've long considered Iowa one of the best places to coach, and really it's pretty much the majority of what I know during my time in coaching. I think the one commonality, whether it's the '80s or certainly the last 20-plus years, just the quality of people. That's coaches I've worked with, also the players, most importantly the players. Just outstanding people and outstanding leaders. So I feel very, very fortunate about that.

I think, probably like most everybody that stood up here thus far and will continue to come up here, there's a real love of the game that I think all of us possess and certainly a love of coaching.

That being said, I probably wouldn't be the only person to say I'm really concerned about the path that college football is on right now and eager to see where it heads and what direction we end up taking.

But it's a great game. It was a big thing in 1980 when I went to the University of Pittsburgh as a grad assistant. It was big when I went to Iowa in '81. If anything, it's just grown bigger certainly. It's always been big, and it's bigger

now.

With that, I think you just have to think about our players, think about the voices that they hear, the things that they have to deal with, the hands that are on them, the noise that they're listening to, and most of all, I think the pressure. That's certainly a concern I have as I think about our football team. I've long felt that way.

I think sometimes we lose sight about just how young our players are and just how recently they maybe are in the backyard catching a pass or out playing in the street playing touch football. It goes quickly for those guys. Everybody that plays in the Big Ten typically is the best player on their high school football team and certainly one of their best, but all of that being said, it's still a big jump going into college football just like it is if they play beyond.

All that being said, their focus on Iowa, at least in my 33 years, has been on development of our players and trying to help them grow and prepare for lives after their college experience. Small percentage will get an opportunity to play in the NFL, much smaller percentage will have a career in the NFL. But for the most part, the reality is most players, their careers end when their eligibility expires.

That's why I think it's so important, when they're in college, they're doing more than just learning plays and developing their skill set. To me the best part about football in college football is just learning to be a part of a team and what that really means, just having respect for other people and realizing there's a lot of other things that are bigger than you. To me, that carries our players well as they move into their adult lives.

Our message this year for our team in 2022 is the same as it's ever been. Just wanted our guys to focus on the love of the game, love of the work that's involved, which was significant, and most importantly, the love of the people you're with. To me, that's the best part about sports and certainly the best part about football.

If you do that, my experience is the player ends up being a better player, but more importantly, a better person and is better prepared to move on into adult life. That's the



ultimate reality for most of our players.

A couple words about our team. It's pretty much like every year, we have a really good group of veteran players back. We had a good football team, as Commissioner Warren cited, last year. So we've lost some good players and have voids to fill. We've had a chance as coaches to watch the guys we anticipate moving into those positions, working behind the scenes, if you will, or on the practice field an awful lot. Just excited to see where they all go, how they grow, how they develop, how they meet the challenges.

Certainly a lot of excitement for everybody this time of year, fans and coaches as well, but also some anxiety in that you're never quite sure how a player is going to react when they come out of the tunnel and the Swarm, 70,000 people there to cheer them on. You're just never sure how they're going to go. We've seen growth, and we're excited to see how it unfolds next week.

Defensively real quickly, we lost three really quality players on the back end, Matt Hankins, Jack Koerner, and Dane Belton, three outstanding players up front, Zach VanValkenburg. We've got some work to do in the back end certainly.

Up front collectively we've got a good group of guys that really grew last year, and hopefully they'll continue to grow and fill in those voids. We've got veteran players certainly coming back at the linebacker position. Jack Campbell is here. Kaevon Merriweather in the back end. Riley Moss is one of our better players. Those are some of the guys we'll be leaning on to help the younger guys move forward.

Then offensively, unlike the defense, or not unlike the defensive line, we were young last year. We had one of the best players in college football in Tyler Linderbaum, but overall we're a pretty young group. We lose Tyler, but collectively we feel good about the group and anxious to see how they develop.

We've got two quarterbacks that have won games for us and played well on the field. We expect both of them, anticipate they're both going to be better this year in Spencer Petras and Alex Padilla. Then in the running back/receiver room, both of those groups are young. We've got a lot of young players in both of those outside of Nico Ragaini, who's a veteran receiver, but the rest of the guys are young in both those positions. Williams is at the running back position. And Arland Bruce, Keagan Johnson, just to name a couple of receivers. It will be interesting to see how they develop here in year two for those guys and grow.

Then the tight end position we feel good about with Sam

LaPorta is here with the group, and Luke Lachey is a really good football player as well. We've got some work to do and growing to make and improvement to make. We'll see how that comes out.

Special teams is a tale of two cities. Tory Taylor back at our punter for his third season, a really unique young person, a really good football player. But we lost Caleb Shudak, an outstanding placekicker. That competition is open right now.

I can say the same thing about the return game, we've got guys auditioning for that.

We're excited to start. We're excited to get back on the field with our players and see what August brings, and we'll know a little bit more about our team certainly at the end of the month. That being said, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. It's been about five months since you had Brian move over to coaching quarterbacks. What have been your impressions so far of how things have gone?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's done a great job. I think we have an outstanding staff right now, and selfishly one of the nice things, we have five former players. Means I'm getting old, I guess. We have five former players on our staff.

I think he's made the transition well. He's worked hard at it. Jon Budmayr joined our staff as an analyst. He's been a great resource as well as some other people.

I think the key component from my vantage point was to have our play caller be coaching our quarterbacks. Just trying to minimize some opportunities for confusion or that type of thing and try to get a little more clarity in what we're doing. So, so far, so good.

Q. Last week it was reported that your assistant coaches received like a 31 percent bump in salary. However, your son, office coordinator Brian Ferentz, received the smallest increase. Was that a reason that Iowa's struggles with offense have anything to do with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not necessarily. I think he's been compensated really well. Bottom line, two things, I feel like our staff, the numbers, there's reasons for everything we do, and we have private conversations regarding that. I feel like the staff salaries reflect levels of experience, contributions to the program.

The other part about it -- and that was important, as you probably know -- I signed a contract back at the new year, and there were two things that were important to me. Most

important was just making sure our staff was well compensated. I just got done saying I really feel good about our entire staff. If we end up losing a coach, I want it to be for really good reasons, not because we're not able to pay them enough.

As a head coach, it's important to me that we're able to keep guys, retain guys, and hopefully it's an attractive place for them to work.

As I said in my earlier comments, to me it's been one of the greatest places ever to work, and I hope our staff feels the same way. I think we're in a good place with everybody on the staff.

Q. Jack Campbell seems to be on a similar trajectory as some of the better linebackers you've had in your tenure. In what ways is he similar to the better ones that came through, and are there any physical or other traits that make him special or unique?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's got a skill set that's unusual, just his height and range. It's a little bit unusual for us, at least historically. I don't know the exact numbers, but he's probably our tallest linebacker probably in 23 years, I'm guessing.

Beyond that, he just plays smart and plays with unbelievable desire. I think the first thing I would cite with Jack, and that's probably true of a lot of really good players I've been around pro, college, or high school, or good coaches I've been around, he's extremely humble. He's not about taking credit for anything.

He deserves a lot. He is a leader in his way. But he's authentic, he's humble, and really driven to do his best, and he's doing it for all the right reasons. He's got great pride in what he does, but he also feels a responsibility to really be at his best for our team.

As a coach, you just value that so much and appreciate it.

Q. I saw that you were on hand at The Swarm Collective's press conference. How did that relationship come about, and what is that relationship like ongoing?

KIRK FERENTZ: The relationship with Brad, is that what you're referring to? I just had the good fortune of meeting Brad here in the last two months. I'll share this, and I say this often, one of my biggest fears of coming back to college football 23-plus years ago was donors. It's been one of the greatest fortunes in my life the donors I got to meet and get involved with. When I say donors, I'm talking about people who just really support our program.

Brad has just done an unbelievable job. I can't imagine how much time and energy he's put into this. As I mentioned, I just met him inside a window of two months. Just an extremely impressive person. I never knew what an actuary does, nor did I really understand how you become an actuary. Everybody I knew in college that was going to become an accountant, they wanted to jump out of windows all the time, and actuary is probably ten times harder. He's a really smart guy, I think it's fair to say that.

Got a great personality, great resilience. He was an athlete. I'm so appreciative. I don't want to speak for other people, but I think I speak for everyone on campus who is just appreciative of his interest and his willingness to help. I think we're doing it in a way that fits our program, the values, and the way we see the world.

I'm extremely appreciative to Brad's willingness to get involved and his contributions already.

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