

Big Ten Conference Football Championship Game: Michigan vs Iowa

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lucas Oil Stadium

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



Michigan - 42, Iowa - 3

COACH FERENTZ: Start out congratulating Michigan. They played a great game. They've had an outstanding season. They're just a really talented football team and they performed extremely well. They've been consistent all season long. So hats off to them tonight, certainly.

We knew this game would be a big challenge coming into it. Got a lot of respect for what they've done this season. Knew we'd have to play our best and make some things go our way. And obviously that didn't materialize.

It's certainly disappointing tonight. And it certainly hurts. Everybody in the locker room is very disappointed. Not feeling so great. But the one thing I'll say about this football team, somehow this season they found a way to win 10 football games. They can be really proud of that. And we still have another game to go.

So, just told the guys in the locker room, on behalf of our entire staff, how proud we are of what they've done since January. And tonight certainly wasn't what we intended it to be. Didn't turn out the way we wanted it to. But we'll put this behind us after a couple of days, go back to work at the end of the week and try to be smart about the month and have an opportunity to play one more time as a team, as the 2021 team. Looking forward to that.

Q. Was there anything (indiscernible)?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I mean they hit us with that halfback pass. But it's just a good play on their part and bad execution on ours. Just to help to simplify things, you play a team like this, that's a really good football team and you don't want to give up big plays. And we did that twice right off the bat. We had a couple of trips to the red zone. We had three points to show for it.

You never know where it's going to go, what's going to happen. But in a game like this this is not the way you want to start out.

Q. (Indiscernible) health thing?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it's a health thing, Spencer -- I'm not sure what he has right now, something in his torso. He just couldn't perform.

Q. (Indiscernible) before the game or?

COACH FERENTZ: During the game, absolutely.

Q. (Inaudible)?

COACH FERENTZ: Just one thing leads to another sometimes. And I've been in games like that, unfortunately, and they're not much fun. I'm not sure the score is totally representative of the two teams. It just is the way it went tonight. Go back to the early part of the game, for us to win this thing tonight we would have to not give up big plays, make them work at driving it. They did it a couple times in the first three quarters. But you give up a big play or two big plays it's tough to do that against a good opponent.

Again, we got the ball down in there a couple times -- you want to come out with a touchdown at least, if not a field goal. We just couldn't connect there. That's kind of representative of the game, I guess.

Q. (Inaudible)?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had it in the playbook, and we've executed it pretty well. Looked like they got a little discombobulated, whether the throw was off for Monte, I'm not sure what happened. He just couldn't adjust on the ball, it was there. Couldn't execute it.

It was a shot play, just like the one they took. And theirs was 70-plus yards for a touchdown. Ours came up incomplete.



**Q. [Question about defense being uncharacteristic].
What happened on the long run?**

COACH FERENTZ: We didn't do a good enough job of redirecting the football. We didn't tackle well. Looked like a couple guys might have had a shot. You don't want any clean runs to go through that, whatever it was, 70, 75 yards.

You don't want to give up 12-yard runs either but that's better than -- you can fight another day. But when you give up a big one like that, it flips you and puts you on your heels.

Q. (Inaudible)?

COACH FERENTZ: We had the ball. We started out on offense. The idea was to go down and get a score and see what happens. And for us to win it it was going to be a close game. It was one of those shots. But it certainly got away from us in the second half.

Q. [Question about the red zone].

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if there's any one thing. But tonight these guys played really good defense on us and got us in a lot of tough third-down situations. With their rush that's a concern because you don't want to give the game away just on a third down early, that type of deal. But we just couldn't knock it in there.

**Q. How do you put it in perspective for your guys?
You still won (inaudible) got them the first time this year?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's what I told them after the game. We're extremely proud of them. And they can be very proud of themselves, walk out with their heads held high.

Tonight is disappointing, and when you compete sometimes it doesn't work out the way you want, and sometimes it works like this. And this wasn't much fun.

But it's one game out of, what, 13 and we've still got one to go. You can't take this thing out of the loss; that's impossible. We'll go back to work at the end of the week. And we'll try to be smart how we treat things mentally more so than even physically with our team as we move forward, and get ourselves ready to play our best in the last ball game here.

Q. What went into the (indiscernible) punt 21-13?

COACH FERENTZ: You go back and forth on that one.

You're playing for field position. We got field position a couple times there in that sequence there, just couldn't capitalize on it. You're thinking field position, maybe get right back, have a chance to score. And if you don't convert then you've got a chance to end up going the other way, which it didn't. But that was our thinking.

Q. What about the runs on the second and third and long?

COACH FERENTZ: On the second and long, you're trying to get it to third and medium or third and short. And a little scar tissue from just watching the Wisconsin game. It was a 10-point game in the fourth quarter, ten minutes left, something like that, then two separate plays in a row, all of a sudden they're down 10 more points because you're trying to minimize that rush and can't do a good job.

One was a strip sack and then they forced a bad pick. And so you don't want the game to get out of hand there. That was our thinking trying to be smart about it and give ourselves a chance keep pushing through it.

Q. Seemed like your run game had made strides the previous four games. But tonight was just a matter of stepping up a class?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they've got a veteran front, a pro-style defense in some ways, big bulky guys in the middle, very stout guys. 97 is a heck of a player run or pass. They sub and do good job with big bodies. They made it really tough to run the football tonight. We expected that. But we were hoping to run with success, too.

Q. Can you tell us what they told you about the targeting review?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, in their judgment it wasn't -- I'm not sure what the exact quote was. But it wasn't, like, a vicious hit, I guess. And I'm not second-guessing anything tonight on that call. That's one more rule we've really made complicated. When it started to me it was for, when my sister who was sitting in row 30 says, boy, that was a bad play.

Now it's, like, it's way too technical, in my opinion. But that wasn't the deciding factor in the game by any means. That wasn't the play where Petras got injured either.

Q. These games, where you play a team like Michigan or in the past won these games, do you bring them the way you want to play? And how much did those big plays early kind of take you out of your game that where you could have gotten into that --

COACH FERENTZ: That's exactly what I was referencing. I think, for the record, we were 7-5 last 12 games against these guys. Not tonight obviously. To make that work you've got to make them drive it and earn everything they get. And when we have opportunity we've got to find a way to come up with points. And field goals aren't the end of the world but at some point you need some touchdowns, too.

And for us to win in a game like that, I think we gave ourselves a chance in the kicking game minus the field goal initially. And then we've got a punt block to add to it, and that's -- you wonder how the score gets out of hands -- those things really help flip it the other way.

But that was the script we were hoping to follow. And the games that we have won against them, that's typically how it goes. But we just weren't up for it tonight. And we'll get back to work this week.

Q. Spencer obviously didn't have the numbers that you would like. How much was that just performance or how much of that was that torso injury?

COACH FERENTZ: I think a lot of it was Michigan's defense. They're good. They've got a good defense. And give them credit. They played really well tonight. Didn't seem like, from where I was standing -- gotta look at the film -- didn't seem like we had a lot of guys wide open. We had a hard time getting open, and a good pass rush up front, guys not getting open. Only thing that really seemed to -- hit them on a couple boot legs, that type of deal and some of the quick passes to Goodson, hit him on a screen one time. They make it tough on you.

Q. When you play a defense like Michigan how difficult is it, especially on offense when you're limited, and just trying to press the right button at the right time whereas you don't have a full playbook?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a challenge. We have a lot of respect for them coming in. Even more now. Certainly their defensive side, both sides, but their defense. We knew it was going to be tough, but we still thought we'd be able to come up with something. And obviously it didn't work out the way we hoped.

Q. What adjustments did you make against their pass rush (indiscernible)?

COACH FERENTZ: There's not a heck of a lot you can do, try to throw the ball quickly. You try to chip with the tight ends or backs. It's not new to the guys. They've been seeing it all season long. The other thing you can try to do

is minimize the third and longs. And if you do get into them, be smart, because as I alluded to, they can change the game, that Wisconsin game changed real fast in the fourth quarter.

Just trying to give yourself a chance to stay competitive in the game and close the gap at some point. But they make it a real challenge. And I alluded to it, they're a good pro defense where they're stout inside and then passing downs they've got two guys that can rush that passer really well. It affects the game.

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