

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon to everybody. I will take a couple of minutes to talk a little bit about the weekend and then certainly Colorado State. First of all, it's always good to get the victory. It's number one on the list, and we basically have two goals every week, to try to win the game that's at hand and hopefully show some growth as a football team. And obviously, looking at the score, it always makes it easy to determine the first, but I think the second one is a little bit harder to gauge coming off the field.

And after watching the tape, I think we saw a lot of really good things, especially up front on both sides of the line of scrimmage. Got a lot of young players playing on both sides of the ball, or inexperienced players. Really pleased with some of the things we saw. Just little intricate details and good reactions by guys that maybe weren't doing things quite as well a couple of weeks ago. We thought we saw some growth there.

Certainly offensively, pleased with that drive we had in the second quarter. And I thought we did a lot of good things. The play that got taken back, the third down reception impacted the game in a lot of ways, just the momentum, that type of thing, but outside of that I thought we saw some good things. And then, defensively, anytime you give up seven points you're happy about that, and that's first and foremost on defense.

But the big play, we got victimized by some big plays, and that's not good at any time. As I said Saturday, I thought special teams impacted the game pretty positively for the most part, but we missed some opportunities there, too, and they were really close. All that being said, just a lot of room for growth for our football team. A lot of good things, but a lot of errors we can still improve on for sure.

Moving to Colorado State, we've got the four captains that we started with, Tyler Linderbaum, Matt Hankins, Jack Koerner and Spencer Petras. They'll be the four captains out there Saturday. On the injury front, Kyler Schott came out of the game pretty good, and he's not in great shape yet, playing shape, but at least he's moving in the right

direction. So he'll be back. And then, unfortunately, Ethan Hurkett is going to miss some time here. He incurred an injury in the second half, I believe it was. So he'll be out.

Colorado State is coming off a really impressive win, a good win, over Toledo, who took Notre Dame to the wire the week before that. So it was a good road win for them certainly, their first road trip. Their staff is a really good staff. Coach Addazio was up at Boston College when we played them in the Pinstripe Bowl. So certainly familiar with his past. And you see a lot of similarities between what they were doing at Boston College and what they're doing at Colorado State, not only in terms of scheme, but also the way their guys play. They're a big team, physical team, especially up front. They do a good job there. They've got a big running back; BC had a good running back, a big physical guy last time we played them. I think the quarterback is doing a really nice job for them, and basically, again, they just have good size, physical team, and they don't beat themselves. They're really sound. Do a good job protecting the football, don't give up easy things and have done a nice job there. And the only thing I would just interject you're probably going to see as good a tight end as there is in the country. They've got a guy who's really playing well, a local guy from right there in Fort Collins, I believe. He's a really good football player. His brother is a good player, too, but he's an outstanding tight end.

That's kind of what we're looking at right now and trying to get ready for. If you look at this season as if it were a game, we're about a quarter to done right now. It's gone fast. It always goes fast once it gets going. It takes forever to get going. That first game week is always lengthy, but nonetheless, it just illustrates, again, we got a really long road in front of us right now, a lot of football ahead still and a lot of opportunity with that. But all that being said, our focus right now is just what I said earlier, getting ready for this game and also trying to improve. And that's always a two-fold task as we go from that.

We are excited to be at home. We have Bradley Stephens, the Kid Captain. He's a nine-year-old from Gladbrook, Iowa, and he'll be with us on Saturday. That being said, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. What kind differences did you see in having Kyler Schott back on the field this past weekend, seeing him

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in practice again?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. Just in a nutshell, Kyler knows how to play, you know. I guess that sounds pretty basic and mundane, but guys that have been out there just react a little bit more naturally and a little quicker. So I think that part shows up right away. And we see it in practice every day, at least the last couple of weeks. So that's good. The more of that you can add to your mix, the better off you're going to be. But he's not really, like I said, in game shape yet. I don't think he finished the one drive he was in on. Maybe it was that long drive. But he had to come out. It's going to take a while to get him back where he can play a full game, but it's good to have him in the mix. In the meantime we're getting a lot of other guys that are getting really valuable experience, and that's a positive, too.

Q. I wanted to ask about the fake punt.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. It's called bad coaching. Right here. I'll take that one. It was dumb. Dumb. That's a really dumb -- that was a dumb sequence.

Q. It did look like there was a lot of wrong with it. What kind of went wrong with the play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just it was a bad call on my part to think that might be a good idea at that point. It was dumb on a lot of levels. There was only one positive. It's on film now, so people are going to think, okay, maybe they're going to fake a punt. In that case they'll probably say, I hope they do it in that situation. It would be great. It was fourth and eight or nine or whatever it was. That was just dumb. At a dumb time. I mean, in retrospect, really dumb. Easy to laugh when you win.

Q. It doesn't come up when you win. I want to ask about special teams, but not the dumb part.

KIRK FERENTZ: Appreciate that.

Q. It was pretty much seven, eight years ago there were a lot of mistakes, especially fake punts, onside kicks you guys liked to go through. That hasn't been the case. It seems like LeVar has helped stabilize that. What ways have you shored up specialized teams? Last year I think it was rated the best unit in the country.

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't thank the NCAA for much publicly, so I'll take this opportunity since you teed it up for me. I'll thank them for allowing us to expand our catching staff. And there's a reason why the NFL teams have had special teams coaches, really it probably started back in the 70s, I guess. Coach Belichick was on the front end of that.

But, yes, it's a world of difference. Those guys, in my opinion, have always kind of been cheated a little bit, especially the specialists. You know, people without a country in some ways. They just kind of float. They're nomads. This guy kind of coaches them, but really doesn't because he's got another position to coach and all that kind of thing. So I think the ability, first of all, for the specialists, just for them to meet with LeVar daily just like everybody else does with their position coaches, I think that's been huge. And then to have a coach who's solely focused on the schemes, the calls, strategies, all those things. That's a whole world within the world of football. So that part's all been good, I think, but the rule enabled us to do that.

The only other way you could do was to cheat it, which we tried a little bit. Maybe having a grad assistant coach at tight ends or at different positions, but I think that's helped, and then the other component here is that LeVar has really grown into that role, really embraced it and grown into it, and that's how he made his living in the NFL, being a good special teams player. So he can fully appreciate the value of it and what goes into it and what difference it can make. So he's engrossed himself in it. Wasn't an expert necessarily on the specialist part of it, but has really expanded his knowledge there, and that's been great. And so I think it's been a really good combination.

And it's been fun to watch. It's fun to watch players. Terry Roberts is a great example. I think he's grown into a good football player through special teams. We've had that all throughout the years, but now they're getting a little more attention that way, and they can go meet with Coach Woods and get one-on-one coaching, which was a little tougher back in the old days, if you will. So I think it's been great for us, and it's a huge part. It's always been a huge part of our program thinking wise.

Q. Along those lines with the special teams, you switched out your long snapper at Iowa State and stuck with him. What can you tell us about your new long snapper and what went into that decision?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's done a good job. We pretty much base things on what we see in practice and what we see in games, and right now we just feel like he gives us a little better opportunity out there. Luke's done a good job. I tease the coaching staff. I ask, are we sure he's got a driver's license? He looks like he's 14. He's a really young-looking guy. And they assure me he does. It doesn't matter. You can still snap without a driver's license, but he is a young-looking guy, so I try not to think too much about that. He's done a good job, though. We liked him a lot in recruiting. He's just done a really good job.

Q. You've got a three-week sample size now of your offense so far this season. What do you like about where they're at right now and what's the next step?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we took strides. We were a little more detailed. And I thought today was probably our best offensive practice this year, which maybe coincides with fall. It felt like fall, it I think this is the first day of fall. But it looked -- we just seemed a little more cohesive out there and a little better with our execution, that type of thing. It takes time. It's frustrating at times, and you want things to go faster and all that, and we're not there yet, but at least I think we're moving in the right direction. And saw some things out there Saturday. Again, that drive obviously sticks out. I can't guarantee that we would have continued to drive on that one play on our sideline, but felt like we had a little momentum going. And wasn't meant to be. But just general seeing some execution. A lot of it has to do with what goes up front. I think those guys played their best. I know they played their best Saturday relative to the other two games.

Q. A lot of your players were talking about the importance of building that short-term memory, whether it's a long drive, whether it's Ivory Kelly-Martin having a couple of fumbles here and there. I know that experience plays into that, but what else goes into building that short-term memory and kind of enabling them to learn how to go to the next play and move on?

KIRK FERENTZ: We try to talk about it, and you try to reinforce it in whatever way you can. But ultimately players just have to develop that. That's where mental toughness comes in, too. And you learn from anything that happens in life, whether it's good or bad, but at some point you have to move on. And that really -- you know, if you're in the business of, which our players are, competing out there on Saturdays, you just can't sit and dwell on things and you can't celebrate a good thing too long, either. Celebrate it. I'm all for that. But in a game you have to keep moving, you have to keep your eyes looking forward.

I said this the other day about Ivory. I mean Ivory's played. So it's not like he doesn't know what to do. He knows what to do. And that's part of the film review, too. You go back and look at those two plays. The guy got a helmet on a ball. That's tough. It was one of those circumstances. Not excusing it or saying it's okay, but it's a tough situation. And the other one I'm just glad he was able to get up and walk away. It looked like a car wreck out there. It was really a crazy play. And just bad timing for him obviously at that point.

But he's practicing well. We've had two days already. He's

practicing well, and he'll play well Saturday, I'm confident of that. It's part of life. You can't dwell on things. And if there's something that has to be corrected, then it's has to be corrected, but that's not the case in this one.

Q. Looking at it Saturday, you mentioned McBride. How much of a challenge is he to cover in terms of game planning for him?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's really good. And a couple things about him. He does everything well. He blocks well. They pull him a lot. Bring him across the formation, that type of thing. And then it's interesting, the offensive coordinator now was at Wisconsin, played at Wisconsin, was up there. And they've done a nice job the last couple of decades of what they do to feature good tight ends. So you see some of that thinking in there, too, some of the screen passes they run and little things they do that are a little bit unique. So you can see that flavor being integrated into the offense.

But, yeah, they're going to get him the ball. They're going to put it in his hands. And he's a really good blocker. He's a big physical guy, but also a really good runner, too. And they're going to make sure he gets the ball, which that is good coaching.

Q. Does it help when you have kind of a good history of tight ends here in terms of in practice?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. I mean our guys on the scout team don't look like that guy, I can tell you that. It's just one of those deals. But at least we know what one looks like. That's for sure. And we've played against a lot of really good tight ends. I mentioned Wisconsin, which typically has some guys that are pretty tough to defend. But it's still a unique challenge, and I think that's one reason tight ends are at a premium. If you think about the NFL game, if you got one, it's really an advantage because they're tough to match up on, especially if they can block a little bit.

Q. You made a point to get Tyrone Tracy involved more last week. How important is it going to be to get Tyrone involved in the offense for you guys going forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know that we necessarily went in the game saying we gotta get him X amount of touches, but he did have more, and that's a good thing for us, and it's something for us to be mindful of. Sometimes you can't always control that. Yeah, he's a really good football player and a great young guy, and he knows what to do with the ball in his hand. My biggest fear, and I may have said this Saturday, sometimes I think we're trying to do too much with one play. Just let it play out. And it's kind of like

defense, you get turnovers by just playing good defense and being aggressive and then the ball will come to you when it comes to you. It's the same way that way, but, yeah, we want to keep Tyrone involved, and whether it's throwing to him, handing it to him, whatever. Really good football player.

Q. It seems like Colorado State brings some similarities to BIG TEN teams, like on offense they look like Wisconsin in a lot of their polls, and they'll go 13 personnel, it seems like, on a frequent basis. And then also, defensively, 4-3, so is this kind of -- first of all, how do you turn your guys around from going against 3-3-5s all the last three weeks, but, also, is it kind of like schematically like an exhale, like, okay, we kind of recognize these types of fronts?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yes and no, but now it's a different matchup. For our defense it's very different than what we've been playing against and what we've seen. And like when we played Boston College, I mean they really -- they get a bunch of big guys up front, and boy, you better be really gap sound to all those types of things because the back will come shooting through there if somebody misses or is a little bit off where they're supposed to be. They make it hard because they got big bodies coming out on you, and it's tough that way.

So that's going to be a unique challenge probably from what we've seen. There was a little bit of that last week, but it's not quite the same, and you can't match the size that Colorado State's got offensively.

So, yeah, it's going to be a little bit different than flipping it over. This defense looks a little more recognizable, if that's the right word, compared to what we've faced the last couple weeks, but still, they do some things that we're going to have to be ready for, and I think their guys inside are probably going to challenge us more than maybe anybody we've seen thus far. They got a couple really physical, active guys inside. So that's going to be -- we'll see how we can hold up with our interior guys.

Q. When you were recruiting Spencer from a place and an area that you don't normally recruit much, what was it about him that you said this guy fits what we do?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of interesting. During that recruiting cycle I was starting to wonder if we were going to like a quarterback. We were just having a hard time getting traction on, it seemed like, anybody. And then Ken finally liked someone. There was someone down in Texas. I don't think it was a South Lake Carroll, but it was -- I can't remember. He was maybe in Austin. Tom would probably

know. You're the expert on that. Somewhere down in Texas. So we offered him, and like a week later Ohio State offered him and he was gone. So, okay, we're back to nobody. And then we ended up on Spencer and then a quarterback out in Salt Lake City who was a pretty good player, turned out to be pretty good. So it was kind of an either-or type situation. And, really, what it boiled down to was who could get here first, and the quarterback from Utah couldn't make it. I think it was a playoff game or whatever happened. And Spencer and his family came out after a playoff game. They played on a Saturday. They were having fires out there. But, anyway, it threw them off schedule. They took a red eye in here. So, anyway, he was the first guy to show up, and Ken really had been out there and investigated him, felt great about everything, talked to the high school coach and all that stuff. And once he got here, I think we all felt really good about him. Just the kind of person he is. He's really a top-notch guy. He really likes football. It's in his blood. It's important to him, and he's really conscientious, great work ethic. And we thought he was a pretty good player on film. That's kind of how I remember it. I don't know if that's factual, but that's how I remember it, and obviously we're thrilled he's here.

Q. Jestin Jacobs said something earlier today along the lines of players and coaches try not to use youth as an excuse. Looking at the first three games, a lot of players on the defensive line who are young have really stepped up. Two-part question. What is that process like of building up their confidence and what is it like to see them have that success early on?

KIRK FERENTZ: Peter King had a great line a year ago, during the pandemic. And basically the line was, whenever the chaos ends, all anybody is going to care about is football, the football. So whether quarantines, all that stuff and all the things we were all challenged with last year, his point was whenever the ball gets teed up, nobody really cares. Forget about all the alibis, all the reasons you can't get something done. And that's really stuck with me, and I think that's really kind of been part of our -- not mantra, but just discussion this year is like nobody really cares if we're young at this spot or that spot, because ultimately whenever you play the games it's about getting the job done that day.

So, again, I said it I think before, just going into this season that's probably been my biggest concern, the amount of guys that we've had that really haven't been through a lot. And we're hardly there yet, but at least we're making progress, and we've held up in some tough circumstances and situations. So it gives you encouragement certainly. And then you just see the guys doing things with a little bit more confidence now. But, we still only have played one road game, and there are still a lot of things in front of us

that we haven't done or been faced with. But I also gotta think at least our guys can start -- they've got some evidence now that, hey, maybe I can do this and do it pretty well. So hopefully it's something we can build on. But that's everybody doing their part to make that happen. So I feel a little bit better about things now than I did a month ago certainly.

Q. With Kyler back into the mix when he gets in game shape, how do you feel about the interior of the offensive line, what type of rotation you might have looking forward?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll figure that out, but the good news is now I think we have some guys that can play, and a month ago I wasn't sure, or two months ago for sure. You just wondered about a lot of things. And at that point before Kyler got hurt, just two things you figure you can count on are Linderbaum and Schott. Felt like we had a pretty good idea how they'd respond. So we have a lot more evidence now. If there is a blessing of somebody being out of the mix, it gives other guys the opportunity to prove that they can belong and do some things. And, again, we're seeing improvement in practice, which makes me feel better. I think all of us feel a little bit better just when you watch it on film, hey, this guy is starting to see it a little faster, hit a little faster and those kinds of things, the things those veteran guys do already. That's good.

I mean, during my time coaching at any level basically, but especially in the college level, if you got seven or eight guys you can put in a game and feel confident, boy, you're in good shape. And, yeah, we're approaching that way. We're not there yet, but we're approaching. I think it's realistic to think that's a possibility, and maybe we can get to nine. That would be pretty good. My first year in college football was at Pitt in 1980, and I swear to God, we had five really good players. We had a sixth guy, we rotated two guards. After that it was Jim Sweeney, who was a true freshman, had a great career in the NFL, but at that time he was like 219 pounds out of South Catholic High School. He was the mutt. There were two other guys. One went to Penn State; one went to Tennessee, and then Jim came to Pitt. He was the best of the three. But anyway. Nobody knew that. But he was our seventh guy. Just kind of puts things in perspective. I kind of carry that with me all the time when you start getting nervous about things.

Q. Pretty rare that you rotate six receivers. It's usually four.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. What has made you kind of expand that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Just like the line discussion earlier, it just depends on who's -- what's the level, and if you got three guys up here and everybody else down there, those three are playing. But it's really pretty close right now. Arland and Keagan, they're young guys, but they do encouraging things. If somebody starts to really separate, we'll probably lean a little bit more to the left or right. But for right now I think we've got a pretty healthy situation. We're seeing some good things. It's good to see a guy like Jackson Ritter jump in and make some plays; made one the other day again, right? Those are encouraging things. Those are little subtle things that hopefully will help us build as we go.

Q. I think this was the first game I can remember in a while you didn't run any Wildcat. Just want to make sure that's not dead.

KIRK FERENTZ: No, it's not dead. Willie the Wildcat is still roaming our playbook somewhere. I didn't even notice that. But you're right. Yeah, we still got it.

Q. Is it ideal to you that you continue with like to have six guys in competition like that or would you rather have guys solidified and say we know who our four or five are?

KIRK FERENTZ: If we have six we can put in the game, that's great. And that'll play itself out as we go. But we don't have a master plan right now. We're just kind of playing it week by week, day by day. As long as those guys practice well, they're going to keep being in there, and we'll see how it all settles out.

Q. You've rarely used a true freshman close to the ball like this, except for Tristan, who's other worldly in a lot of ways, but Connor Colby getting a lot of snaps and especially at guard. He probably projects more outside future wise. But what have you seen from him and how has he moved into that, at least the rotation, if not challenging for starting snaps at some point?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's kind of like the two first-year freshmen receivers. Since they've been here, they seem to fit. They act like they belong. Don't seem overwhelmed, and they've done a good job, and Connor has kind of been that same way. And it's unusual for an offensive lineman, as we know. But he's done a pretty good job of it. And we move him around, tackle and guard, doesn't seem to bother him, left, right. So he's a little bit of a nonflappable guy, and that's a good thing, and it doesn't seem too big. There are still things he's learning. He balks every now and then and makes a mistake and two and that type of deal. But, no, it's encouraging. That's one we weren't necessarily counting on, but it's been good, and then the door opened a little bit, too, with Kyler's injury. It just opened the door for

everybody to have some more opportunity.

Q. There's been a lot of targeting calls. Are you comfortable with that?

KIRK FERENTZ: No. It's such a hard call. What did I see? Could have been Saturday night, somebody in that game. I didn't see a lot of that game, but it's so hard to be a defensive guy going to the football and then hitting the brakes. Maybe you can do it in a cartoon, but in real life it's hard to do. It's hard to play aggressive football. That said, I understand it, and we need those kinds of rules. I guess I'll go back to the beginning. I always felt like when somebody in Row 48 can say, oh, my God, that person should be kicked out of the game, that's targeting, those flagrant dirty plays, that type of thing. But I understand what we're trying to do. I get it. But it's really hard, and that's a tough call to be right if you're an official.

Q. Because it seems like offensive players --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah. And that's an interesting discussion, too. So cut blocks, right, which I've sworn off of cut blocks. But offensive guys can get cut. I'll put it that way. Like defensive guys will come in and chop our fullback. And then, conversely, if an offensive guy cuts, it's risky. It's a tough job. And the rules have made it tougher, some of the rules we have. I don't know if I'd cut any more on offense outside of that little circumference in the middle there.

Q. Officials talk about the mechanics of the game, that seemed to be the case on the third-down pass to Tyrone Tracy, I know you've had some sort of discussion with the Big Ten, what did they say?

KIRK FERENTZ: In a nutshell, my personal opinion is if someone in the stadium should have final say, it should be the referee, the guy that has the white hat. He earned it. It's a position that comes with a lot of decision making. It's a tough position. So to me at least if somebody's going to get booed, at least get booed for something you did, not something that got passed on to you to deliver the bad news, one of those shots.

And the other thought I have is there oughta be probably a central location where those things are decided. Once we get in Big Ten play, we play seven games a weekend at the most. And two calls a game, maybe three. Do the math. You have different time slots. It can't be that hard. Just pick three or four people or do it nationally, whatever.

The NFL does a lot of things right, and they probably got a better system than we do. Or maybe put it back in the coaches' hands to either challenge or don't challenge. I

don't know. But it needs to be discussed. It really does. It's unfortunate, and that's the way it goes, I guess.

I'll predict this. Nothing is going to happen in the near future, like the next three months. And I'm pretty sure of that.

Q. The offensive line, defensive line may be the most questionable pieces moving forward after losing quite a bit of talent. Defensive line pretty productive so far, maybe ahead of schedule. Offensive line getting there. Are there any areas where maybe you're thinking you're just a little bit behind and you'd like to catch them up to speed?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know about behind. But everything ties to the other -- like everything is so intertwined, and so Saturday we took some strides offensively. But, again, I think a lot of it depends on what we do up front, how we grow and develop there. Not that that's the end-all. But it's easier to have a good offensive team when your line is clicking a little bit, and same on defense. A lot of our success at the back end is predicated on us doing a good job up front defensively.

So when you get everybody playing together, it really gives you a chance, so it's how fast can we improve. And that's always kind of been the story of our teams. If we can get better as the season goes on, then we'll have a chance to have a good team. And if we don't, we'll just kind of be somewhere in the middle or below that.

Everybody's got ownership, or the older guys have to play better, too. And I think for the most part they're all trying to uphold their end of the bargain.

Q. With this being the last game before a really tough stretch of Big Ten play, is there a sense maybe of urgency of like batting down the hatches?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've been doing that for three weeks, and I'd consider last week's game a tough game. I have a lot of respect for their football team and their staff. Had it last week when I stood here, and I've got more for them now. I think they're a really good football team. They gave us a lot of challenges the other day, a lot of problems.

And I've said it before, too. I don't spend a lot of time worrying about opponents. You do whatever work you do in the off season, but I would say I'm not a fanatic and it's up to the coaches to depend how much time they want to invest. To me the focus has always been more about what's in the building here and what we can do to improve.

If you're good enough, you're good enough, and all you

can worry about is how fast you can get better, and obviously you gotta match up against your opponent, and that's part of coaching, too, and that's what we do during the game week. But the bigger target is just what I said we're trying to win games. Basically we have to be moving forward as a football team, and if we do that, we'll get what we deserve at the end of the year. But it's week by week right now, and it's always a challenge.

There's a lot of moving parts. There's just so many things that happen right now. We can't predict what it's going to look like in October or even November. We still have four days until game day. So a lot of things can happen that way, too.

