

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon to everybody. We appreciate the work you do covering the team. You all worked overtime Saturday, probably the longest game any of us were involved in, so we appreciate that.

It feels like we were together here, but a couple words about last week, it was certainly good to see our guys get off to a good start and get back up off the mat after a tough week the week before. Happy about that.

I think two other positives, the guys did a good job refocusing, which you have to credit our leaders on that one, during some unusual delays.

The other thing, too, just occurred to me, it's the first time we've been able to work in the rain. Seems like every time it rained in the preseason, it came with thunder and lightning, so we got chased indoors. Really didn't get to work with a wet ball an extensive period, and did that certainly the other night and came out of it okay that way.

Certainly some positives. I thought we had a little rhythm in that first half offensively. A little tougher in the second part of the game where we had a couple delays.

Part of that was the run game got going a little bit and did some good things there. It was good to get Nico back certainly and a couple young guys getting involved with Keagan Johnson and Kaleb Johnson, and then also Brody Brecht, getting him started a little bit, so that was good.

Defensively, good to get the shut-out and good to see some younger guys step in there and do a decent job, and then special teams, thought the punting game was obviously a factor in our punt return, saw some positives there, but then on the flipside -- Drew Stevens also was a plus there.

On the flipside, we had two penalties in the kicking game, and that's always costly, and not what we're looking for in that regard. That hurt, and our kickoff coverage was not good, especially on the one we let the ball out there, and that was kind of disappointing to that that, as well. A lot of

good things, but always shows on Sunday a lot of things that we can work on, and that's kind of where our attention has been. Also obviously facing Rutgers coming up here.

Shifting gears, captains will be the same four guys this week: Jack Campbell, Sam LaPorta, Kaevon Merriweather and Riley Moss. It's our first Big Ten game, needless to say that's important. First road game and then another night game.

All those three things factored in, it's a little bit different here, and playing a team that's off to a really good start, Rutgers is playing well with a 3-0 record right now, and they're playing well, so they certainly have our full attention.

I've known Coach Schiano over two decades, and have been familiar with his career for quite a while. One thing about him, he's a tremendous football coach, outstanding person, and has done a really good job in a short amount of time there.

Anything from the last time we played them, it's a whole different ballgame right now. If you look at Coach Schiano's track record, he built that program up in the early part of this century here, the first decade here, 2001 to 2011, really gave Rutgers an identity. He did an outstanding job with the program, and you can see him laying the foundation for that right now, at least from our vantage point. They have a really good coaching staff. They're cohesive based on what we're seeing on film.

They definitely have an identity and know what they're trying to get accomplished, and then more importantly you can see their players embracing what it is they're doing.

I think they've certainly worked hard to improve their roster.

We're back in Big Ten play. The guys we're playing are bigger, they're more athletic, and certainly Rutgers has a lot of guys that can cause problems. They have an outstanding punter, also, and we have to look at him, whatever year that was they came over here, just a tremendous football player and receiver kick return guy that's a really big explosive player overall.

Good football team. We have our work cut out, and we're working on that right now.



Last thing, just real quick, tip of the hat to our kid captain Anjouli Sahoe, and she's a six-year old from Atkins, Iowa, and obviously won't be traveling with us, but appreciate her. She'll be with us in spirit and cheering us on.

Q. What's the latest on Keagan Johnson? Saw him in action but didn't see him on the depth chart.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he pulled out somewhere around the 34th, 35th play. It's a nagging injury, and there's nothing to say right now. We'll take it a day at a time.

Q. Is he available for Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't think so. He hasn't practiced yet this week, so we'll see. It's just day-to-day.

Q. When you look at Greg Schiano's record, toughness, physicality seems to be traits and hallmarks of his program, kind of like yours. Is that something that you illustrate to your team, or is it something that they just discover on their own on tape?

KIRK FERENTZ: They see it as soon as we started turning our attention to our opponent, which was yesterday. You watch film on them, I don't want to say they're the same as us, but there's a lot of parallels, I think, in terms of they've got a system defensively and offensively they believe in. They have big, physical guys that are athletic and play hard. They don't do dumb things. They make you earn anything you get, and that's what good teams do, and that's why he's been successful for quite a while. To me it was a very logical pick when they selected him to come back, and unfortunately for them he was interested and available because he knows the state, he's from the state, but he also is an excellent football coach, and he has a staff that looks like they're all on the same page.

Q. Brody Brecht had extensive action, the first of his career. I know there were some misses there, but did you see some good things and what kind of growth do you see possible?

KIRK FERENTZ: First good thing, not to oversimplify it, he was out there playing and competing. So that was good. I thought he worked hard.

There's some things there, like a lot of our players that are young, he got an opportunity to really grow here, not only this week but in the next couple weeks if we can keep him on the field and keep him practicing and getting better.

He made a catch today in practice that was kind of like one

that he missed -- I don't want to say missed, but missed out on the other day. To me that's experience. He's been in our program probably all of about six, seven weeks. I haven't kept day by day track, but I'm guesstimating maybe six, seven weeks on the practice field. That's not enough to really play at a high level for most players.

He has a great attitude, good ability, and we're excited to have him back.

Q. It's your 33rd Big Ten opener as a coach, counting your assistant days. When you came here from Pittsburgh, what were your impressions of the Big Ten, do you remember, and how has that changed?

KIRK FERENTZ: Pittsburghers are kind of provincial in their thinking, and the only thing I knew about the Big Ten was Ohio State and Michigan, and quite frankly I wasn't all that interested in that game, and I can't tell you why.

Just kind of small-world thinker, I guess. Maybe I haven't changed a lot in however many years it's been now.

But yeah, the Big Ten didn't mean much to me. It was more about Pitt, Penn State, West Virginia, back in those days. It was Pitt and Penn State. By the time I got out of high school until I was at Pitt, those were the two teams in the east. This was all new to me, and it was a blur, too, I don't mind telling you.

Q. So when you were here and you beat Ohio State and Michigan --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I figured it out real quick. A lot of things I figured out real fast, and most of them by bad experiences. Ohio State we lost to, Minnesota, lost a trophy game there. So those were some memories that kind of stick with you. But I figured out real quick that being in a conference, which Pitt was not, I think there's a huge advantage to being in conference play. It makes everything so much more different, just more intense.

Q. When you look at the passing game the other day, Spencer looked like he was throwing the ball with a lot of confidence, and the receivers looked like they were still a little rusty, I guess, maybe the way they were attacking the ball versus what they'll probably do five weeks from now or something like that. How does that chemistry grow, and is it just day by day? Can you see the improvements?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you hope to. We feel like we are. We felt like we saw some of that last week, but it's not so basic, but it's so true. Guys have to be on the field and they have to be working together. It's probably true in

every sport. I don't know many other sports, but we're not independent contractors. In football you have to be out there getting the timing down, getting the work done, and from my experience, that's the only way you really improve.

Certainly if you're talking about a passing game where there are a lot of variables and key components involved -- not that I'm not a fan of 7-on-7, but I'm not. It bores me to watch it, and it's not real football because there's so many things that happen when you have pressure on a quarterback, those types of things.

That's how you learn how to play. The biggest thing last week was having some other bodies out on the field helping, just supplementing what we already had.

If we can keep that going in that direction, that trend, that's going to help guys like Arland Bruce who's been shouldering a big load and Sam LaPorta, those guys will be better players when we get a little bit more support around them, a little bit more experience, and certainly help Spencer, too.

Q. Obviously it's not very often that you end a game at 1:39 a.m. How do you adjust in terms of the week? I heard that you pushed back team meetings on Sunday, especially with the first road trip of the year.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll probably have to do the same thing next Sunday, too, because it's a debate how far to do it, but you just adjust as the circumstances present themselves. It seemed like the logical thing to do on Sunday.

Then you just need to make up for it during the course of the week. We tried to get caught up, and I think we're pretty much where we need to be right now, but yesterday we were a little bit behind.

Another complicated thing -- when we switched our schedule back in '15, it makes it a little bit more -- it's a little tougher because you have things Monday morning instead of Tuesday afternoon. But you find a way, that's all. You find a way.

Q. What's it like getting a team prepared to go into a hostile environment to play a football game?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's a challenge, but that's going back to the conference. When you're in a conference, that's just typically part of the weekly routine. You can't be good in your conference if you don't win on the road. That's first and foremost. That's true with non-league or in-league because you're going to play on the road typically close to half your games.

Then in conference play you can expect it to be a good environment, and we're going to walk into one this week, certainly. I know they had a bunch of people go over to Philly last week to watch their game against Temple, and we expect the place to be packed and loud.

I'm old enough to remember the big Rutgers-Louisville game. I think it was on a Thursday night. I remember watching that game, and it was two really good football teams, and it was somebody watching from Iowa City. It was a great football environment. You could tell that.

We have to be prepared for that. It's just going to really test our ability to concentrate, and more younger guys you have out there, the more that's a challenge.

Q. Challenge preparing for three different quarterbacks? They've started three different quarterbacks. What's the challenge there?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, you're just never quite sure what you're going to get, and it sounds like they're not sure, either.

I guess there's good news, we've seen all three quarterbacks on film, so we've got that ability to at least know what to expect a little bit. But you just never know, so we'll just have to try to be ready and adjust as we go.

Q. Personnel-wise, Noah Shannon played only a couple snaps the other day. Is he available this week?

KIRK FERENTZ: Hoping he is, yeah, we'll see. We're hoping by middle of the week he'll be ready to go. We have -- like a lot of teams, you have guys that are out and then you have other guys that are nursing injuries and just trying to play through it. We had a fair amount of guys miss yesterday and maybe a little less today, but that's one of the frustrating things. I was just in there thinking, putting on my tie, you think as you get older you would handle these things a little bit better, but I'm not sure I do. You want everything to be perfect, and it's an imperfect game, and then when you factor injuries in, that makes it a little bit less perfect even more.

That's probably terrible grammar, but you know what I'm saying. It's hard and it's a challenge.

Q. There's a picture from Brian Ray in the locker room. All the offensive linemen still had helmets on and Coach Barnett had a chalkboard?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that group is a little young, so yeah, there's a lot going on there. It was a chance maybe for an extra session.

It's funny, we were talking about how long the delays were. It's a really strange thing. There's a reason I guess we have a clock at halftime, and glad of it, but 20 minutes seems like an eternity sometimes, and yeah, it was just a weird deal. But having to steal a couple minutes and learn something, that's a good deal.

Q. How do you evaluate the offensive line here through three weeks?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're gaining ground, but we're not there. There's still a lot of little things that we can do a lot better, and that gets back to experience. I alluded to it last week that we had some guys that have been playing a lot that have missed a lot of significant time, and that's one -- that isn't my background. It's hard for players that are veteran guys to miss time.

When you get guys that are a little bit younger in their development, it's a little bit of a strain. I think we're chasing the clock there. I think we're gaining ground. We made up the last two weeks, I think we've gained ground, but there's still a lot of loose ends that we can get tied up, and that's a challenge for our guys. If we can just keep closing the gap, that's going to -- I'm encouraged because I think there's potential to be pretty good, but we're not there yet.

Q. Do you have a routine for what you tell the guys, especially the younger guys, first time doing a trip on a plane, first road trip in general, first time in an opposing Big Ten environment?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's pretty simple. Whether it's home or away, because we leave on Friday regardless. We leave campus. You want them to relax. You want them to be at ease. You don't want them to be playing the game, especially the night game, you don't want to play the game during the day. They have to understand and find a way in their own -- whatever works for them, how to stay focused on what they're trying to get done and keep the big picture in mind. Everybody has a little different way of doing things, and historically for me as the week goes on, I tend to try to give the players more space, keep my -- utter my syllables a little bit less and just let them kind of do the work.

I mean, mature guys understand that a little bit better, how to do things, and they maybe understand hostile environments a little bit better. There's only one way to learn. It's like swimming. You've got to get in the water and go. Some of those guys will be figuring it out on Saturday, and hopefully the older guys -- just like the other night, I think the older guys just help keep things steady, even though it was kind of a crazy situation you can't

prepare for.

Q. The guys on your team from Xavier High School in Cedar Rapids, is there a commonality of players who come out of that school?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've always believed in recruiting. It never hurts. It's not a deal breaker if a guy comes from a place where -- I'm standing here thinking about Bill Moss, who you may remember was recruited by Syracuse, and Syracuse had a really bad program back in 1978 and '79. They weren't very good. All due respect to them.

It was Pitt and Syracuse, and Pitt was a little bit better program. He went through Syracuse, and I don't think his team won a high school game. Probably why he wasn't recruited, it was back before the internet and all that stuff, but Bill knew how to play football. He was awesome. He was on the scout team in '80.

But where I'm going with this, players coming from programs where they expect to win and they're used to winning, it's always a benefit. It's not a deal breaker if a guy doesn't, but to me they operate, they understand that most winning programs there is a standard in the program already, so they understand that you're trying to achieve and there is a right way to do things and maybe a not-so-right way to do things, and they know the difference, so it sometimes can save a little time.

Q. Is Leshon Williams back in the mix?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he is. He's full speed and doing great, and just a tough week.

Q. As far as Kaleb Johnson goes, given his performance last Saturday, will you maybe continue to ease him into more opportunities?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, no question. If you earn it, you're going to get it. He certainly has earned it. He's done a really good job.

Part of it was circumstance this past weekend. Really for the first three games we've been a little shorthanded at that position.

During that time -- and this is how it works, too, is if you earn the right to be considered for playing time, and he's certainly, I think, done a nice job since we got started back in August. He's improved every week.

He wasn't perfect the other night, but he looked more comfortable and looked more like the kind of player you hoped he was going to be.

But you know, players have to -- it's a road to get there because he didn't look that way four weeks ago. I think he's earned our confidence and is earning more and more from everybody as we go, and so yeah, if you do that, you get a chance to play. That's a good thing certainly, and it was great to see him look like he did because we've seen him look like that occasionally in August, and it's good, and hopefully there's some consistency there with him. Great young guy.

Q. Has the wet field, wet ball impacted the snap the last couple of games? Seems like there were a few plays where it takes almost a double clutch for Spencer to get the ball.

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if I'd attribute it to that, no. We've had some glitches in the first three games without that being a factor, I think, and that's just, I think, newness. It's not a veteran battery, if you will. A little bit of newness there. Hopefully we're working through that.

Q. Is there a chance Tyler Elsbury would be your starting left guard?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's a chance for anything, yeah. He's in the discussion. Definitely. He's in the discussion at both center and guard right now. It's open competition right now. I think a couple guys are pulling away a little bit, but it's open competition. We're just trying to get that right mix in there.

Q. Was he shuffled back, because we saw at kids' day he was the starter --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we're always -- like every day is a little different, I guess. Some things have been pretty consistent. Richman is pretty much if he's been healthy, been at left tackle, and we've been using a lot of different combinations. We're like you guys, we're trying to find the right combo.

Q. How have you seen Logan Lee grow as a leader?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's two part. He came here like a 30 year old, and he's still that way. He's mature beyond his years. He's just one of those guys. But he's also growing now as a football player, and talking about injuries, he really went through his share of them early in his career. His effort has always been outstanding, but the injuries that take him off the field where he couldn't play football, practice football, it just -- you can't grow and develop. For some guys, things just happen real quickly, but usually it's through repetition.

I think that impeded his progress a little bit, slowed it down, but he's starting to catch on now. Really last year I thought he started to do that climb. He's got great attitude, great skill. Everything about him you love. Now he's starting to play at a little better tempo and speed.

So my point is there is he's a respected player, and then also a tremendous human being. I think guys look up to him. The biggest thing is he just gives great effort. He's been doing that since he got here, whether it's out-of-season program or football.

Q. It appears the rule regarding cut blocking, a lot of the ambiguity was taken out. I know it's a sore spot for you, but how difficult or challenging is it when running an outside slant to incorporate that and what's the timing that has to take place?

KIRK FERENTZ: So if you hang around -- a couple observations. If you hang around by next year or the year after, there won't be any cut blocking. It's a movement right now, I promise you. It's a movement.

That's where this thing is going, unfortunately. It's really critical. I was going to say I've seen two of them on film now, and part of the problem with the rule is the rule is hard, I think, to officiate the way it is now. Wagner got called for a chop block. It would take me five minutes to describe it. I don't blame the official because of the way the rule is, but he didn't see the whole thing.

It was a bad call, but because it's just the rule screwed it up, and it's a whole different discussion.

Then I saw one a week ago against Nevada's opponent, got called for one, and then interestingly enough, I was watching a highlight last night maybe or something like that, I don't know, but I saw a guy do something in a pro game that I didn't think you could do.

Anyway, and it didn't get called, and they call everything in the pros.

What the hell is the question?

Anyway, it's hard to run slants. It's a movement to, again, eliminate the run game because everybody wants to see passes. That's my theory.

Q. When you look at what your back side blocking has to do on that particular play, a lot of times your tackle is trying to go for the 3 technique. How do you make that work without getting called?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I'm getting ready to get in a rules

discussion. One of those stupid things that happened that made me -- anyway, you can still do that, and that's the only thing left except the tight end can't do it coming to the inside which is stupid because the box is the box. It's really a geographical area, and they could make it so simple and so clean by just saying that, but that would take common sense, and common sense isn't so common anymore.

And then the other thing, I fully -- now we're totally on a tangent here. Basically on defense you can just turn and run, and I don't think that's playing defense. Guys that can't play blocks, low blocks can't play defense in my opinion, like they should be playing something else. They can't play defense, or you teach them how to play a low block, which used to be part of coaching football.

Anyway, yeah, I'm really on a tangent, and I'd love to see the data that they keep pointing to. It has nothing to do with Rutgers, so now we're really off the rails. It's bad.

Q. There was a prominent player from Oregon, plays for the Giants, got hurt in training camp --

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't see the play.

Q. It looked like just a normal cut block but he didn't defend it -- you guys would roll those balls to your defenders to sprawl out and defend themselves. On the defensive side now, do you even prepare your players to engage --

KIRK FERENTZ: We still do a little bit. Really the only guys that can get cut are the guys on the interior by rule now.

They should a little bit. Nobody on the outside can do it, which is unfortunate. I don't know how the service academies are even playing, those teams that do a great job on the perimeter.

One of my mentors growing up was a really prominent defensive coach, and that was the first test they did. If the guys couldn't play cut blocks, they threw them over on the other side, like they couldn't play defense and they were down to like 13 guys. This is when he went to a different university.

But the game has changed. Roll with the flow.

Q. In your 23 years of doing this, have you ever seen a punter quite as successful as Tory Taylor up to this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm cheating because I was here

when Roby was here. I got to be here for two years of Reggie Roby. I'm not comparing one to the other -- I'll compare them both. They were guys you noticed. Reggie was a great punter, great guy, and I think probably could have been all-Big Ten several positions because he was that kind of athlete.

In all fairness to Tory, Reggie grew up playing football, basketball, he was just a multisport athlete and a great, great human being.

Tory grew up kicking balls, off the turf apparently because we saw him do that, and that's what he does. He's really good at it, too.

But the big takeaway is it's a real impactful thing, and this great is a great example. You've got two punters that can really alter the game. We spent a lot of time trying to come out of the end zone, I know that, last time we played against this punter.

That's one more thing that's on the list. That really impacts a game. It's huge. If you can master that down -- it takes a good punt, but it also takes guys on the coverage unit doing a nice job.

Q. Rutgers offense, they have a quarterback (indiscernible) run the ball. What sticks out to you about their ability to do so effectively in the first few games?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mentioned Coach Schiano doing a great job building that program. They clearly had a plan and they've brought some new bodies in on the offense up front. They're veteran up there. They've got big guys, and they're good, so just outsider looking in, it looks like they had a plan of building that thing, so they've done a good job with their line, good tight ends, and they've got a couple backs that can run the ball very effectively, actually three of them. It's something they do, and we're going to have to stop that to have a chance.

Q. How excited does LeVar seem when it's a special teams battle like this?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, the way we play, that's always big. It's a really critical thing.

He's done a great job coordinating all the groups, and it's been a plus for us. Like I said, the biggest thing were the two penalties, and they hurt you, and it's like walking a guy in the ninth inning in baseball. Typically it bites you, and those were disappointing.

I think on the kick coverage, I don't know if we just were



assuming it wasn't coming out because they didn't seem interested in bringing it back, or when he dropped the ball, but somehow we didn't look very good, and that ball came out pretty quick, and we can't have that, either, because you're talking about field position.

Q. A couple of players, just kind of housekeeping, is Jacobs available? Deasfernandes? I don't think I saw him the other day. And then somebody I haven't seen all year is Josh Volk.

KIRK FERENTZ: So the first two guys have a shot, I think, to be back. We'll see. Deasfernandes, I think, he practiced today and we're hoping Justin does tomorrow. Again, it's soft tissue so it's hard to predict.

Then Volk has been in and out, but we'll see where he's at. He's not in the two deep right now, though. You won't see him this weekend.

Q. He'd been in there before like last year a couple times --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yep, right.

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