

# University of Iowa Football Media Conference

Friday, November 29, 2024

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Head Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Postgame Press Conference

Iowa 13, Nebraska 10

**KIRK FERENTZ:** Just obviously extremely happy for our team and for our fans. The fans were absolutely fantastic again tonight. We appreciate that.

It really was just a classic November Big Ten football game from my vantage point. Nebraska is a talented football team, and they played really hard and played well. They clearly had momentum at halftime. So we knew it was going to be tough.

Just walking off the field, Albert Einstein quote kind of hit me about, "Not everything that can be counted counts" and then "Not everything that counts can be counted." I think that sometimes explains the way things going in sports. That's what's so interesting as much as you want to analyze it, slice it, dice it, cut it up, all that stuff. I know statistics are important, but sometimes you just have to find a way to win, and our team did that.

Down 10-0... I think our guys really dug in and made plays when it mattered. That's really what you have to do if you are going to be successful. Kept working, it starts there, and they believe in each other too. So big, big things.

And then just a couple of axioms that we always talk about with our guys. Penalties, I think we had one tonight. They had four. It really wasn't that big of a factor, but the fact that we played clean was certainly important.

Turnover-take away margin, for my whole time in coaching that's the most important stat there is, and we came out two-up on the count on that one, and that was obviously a huge thing.

The other building block for us for 20-plus years is just special teams. There were a lot of things happened tonight on special teams that were significant, but it's easy to cherry-pick Drew's field goal at the end, but I would also suggest that punt that Rhys hit prior to that to put them on the 20 tied right in with that.



If you think about that, changing field position, getting the turnover take-away, and then certainly Drew coming up big. Even better there, just think about a year ago with Drew. Basically he got benched at the end of the Nebraska game last year. What a contrast to tonight, and we all had tremendous faith.

Just is really proud of the guys. Proud of how they finished November, 3-1. We won 4 out of our last 5, and to win the last two are really big. We've had our things to overcome, so just proud of the effort everybody put in there.

Then, in closing, really when I got in the locker room, the first thing I said to our guys, younger guys, I just said, I hope you guys are paying attention because things like that hopefully they're learning. They're not out on the field actually doing it, but they're with their teammates watching it.

It all goes back to the older guys, our best guys, our experienced guys doing a great job, and no better illustration there than the play Kaleb made to put us back in the ball game. You can't explain that play. It was just a phenomenal effort.

A lot of good things to get him started. The guys outside did a good job blocking, but what an unbelievable -- just a fantastic individual effort. But, again, if you are going to win a game like that, somebody has to step up and do something. We've had those through history too.

Then the other thing right now is we look forward and have a chance to rest here a little bit, and everybody needs one. It's been a long, tough season. It always is in the Big Ten. That's nothing new there.

It will be really nice for our guys to have some time here to get regrouped a little bit. One thing I do know for sure, wherever we end up, it will be warmer than it was tonight. We'll figure that out whenever they tell us where to go, but right now we're going to enjoy this one and let it kind of simmer for a while. It's a good deal.

I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. I want to actually take you through the decision to kick the first field goal because you recovered the ball at the four. You're probably thinking, We got a chance**



**to get seven. It didn't happen. Did you think at all about --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. Yeah. We punted twice from midfield, right? I'm sure we were getting booed.

Sometimes you can't be a fan. Like you just have to think about what's going on, how we're playing, and think big picture. I mean, I'll be brutally honest. I didn't have confidence we were going to make it on the fourth and one down in there. I do know this, if we didn't get points at that point, it could be problematic. I'm hoping something was going to happen later in the half.

So, fortunately it did. So that will be forgotten by a lot of people, but sometimes you just got to play your gut and go from there. I mean, hell yeah, I wanted to go for it badly.

**Q. After the game Jay Higgins talked about some disrespect I guess that was shown towards the Iowa players before the game and Coach Rhule before the game. Were you aware of those things? What are your thoughts there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I heard some stuff in the locker room, but I wasn't out there. So I didn't see it and really can't comment on it. There are certain pregame etiquette most people follow, but again, I didn't see it. Quite frankly, I'm not too worried about it.

I'll just say this about Jay Higgins... what a football player, what a leader, and he has tremendous integrity. So if Jay tells me something, I'm on board with it.

I'll interject, one of the other guys that's one of our best guys on our team also told me that he tipped the ball on the one where I burned a timeout. It turns out that wasn't true. So you just never know how it's all going to go. It cost us a timeout. I tend to believe our players.

**Q. I think before the season we talked about Drew's kind of ascendance and fighting back after last year. As you mentioned, he got benched. I think there was a point where you said you were worried about if it was going to kind of click back together. I guess for him to be able to go out there, get five field goals last week, make the kick tonight, just kind of an over-arching redemption story. How would you describe the growth and bounceback he has shown this season?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Night-and-day difference. Over the years you read a lot of stuff, and I tend to read about coaches and successful people. I'll never forget Earl Weaver had a quote -- for you young guys, Baltimore Orioles -- they had a really good team, and he was their

manager. Short, little, fiery guy.

But he had a big thing about not having a doghouse for players or the kids that you are raising at home. Unless they really do something egregious, you just have to keep having faith in them and keep seeing them work.

That's the key to this whole thing. Drew has done nothing but mature. He's worked hard. He's earned everything that he has gotten. I tell our guys all the time, You wonder why Caitlin Clark is so good or Steph Curry. How many hours do you think they spend shooting balls? Everybody forgets about that part.

If you want to be really good at what you do, you have to invest and put the time in. I'm not an expert on how many shots Caitlin has practiced or how many -- but I would suspect it's a lot, it's significant.

He's done the hard work. He kicked with great confidence last week in windy conditions, and tonight that wasn't a chip shot. I think all of us felt like, Hey, he'll do it.

**Q. Max's strip sack, what all did you see on that play?**

KIRK FERENTZ: A great effort. A lot of times your coverage has to be good, so the guy has to hold the ball for a while. That's usually how those things work.

So coverage is normally a component. It's hard just to run free through there or beat a guy like that. So you have to cover well enough where he has to hold the ball, and just a great job getting it out.

It came out a couple of times I think tonight, but we only got that one, but it came at a great time and a great position on the field certainly.

**Q. If someone would have told you about the game that you would be shut out in the first half and only muster 164 yards of total offense, would you believe you would still win the game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: The odds are against you, right? The odds are against you, but that's why you can't believe in that stuff. Football is still about finding a way to be successful some how some way. No matter what sport, but this is what we do.

Stats are important, but you know, if it's stats versus coming out top, there's not even a close -- one is way out in front of the other in terms of first and second. Those stats, nobody remembers them in December anyway. It's about finding a way to be successful, and our guys have done a good job of that.

**Q. Clarifying question from pregame. Cade McNamara, didn't see him as part of Senior Day ceremonies. What kind of went into that? Looked like he was among the 23 who were supposed to be honored?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Opt-out is a big term right now, right? Opt-outs... he declined the chance to come out. That's strictly up to him. It was his desire, so we're going to honor that. We'll see where it all goes here. Hopefully he is feeling better.

As I said last week, he's had a rotten three years, so I hope everybody can be empathetic toward that.

**Q. Well, every time I've asked this question from the older guys, from Max, everybody had 100 percent confidence that Drew was going to hit that last field goal. Did you feel the same? And, I guess, do you say anything to him as he is trotting out on the field, or do you just let him go?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, they called the timeout, so he actually came over by our bench to take a couple of practice swings. Right, wrong, or indifferent, I kind of let those guys go. They're in their own zone. They don't need me stating the obvious, like, 'You can do this' or 'Go get it'.

But I would go back and -- I do, I can contradict myself a little bit. Everybody is confident because of the way he practices typically. I think I said before, he is not always -- on Wednesdays sometimes I'll leave the field scratching my head. And I've requested he quit fooling around with new techniques when we're doing team stuff. Do that on your own time. You guys are on your own all the time as kickers.

In general he practices well, but I think everyone knows the maturity. He's a much different player than he was last November, and his teammates all know that, and the way he has been performing, so that's why everybody is confident in him. He's earned that.

**Q. These walk-off wins with field goals have become pretty common for you guys in recent years. What separates winning a game like that and winning games like that as opposed to not?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not comparing us to anybody else. I want to qualify that statement. I think winning in November and I think tight games, and those are both things you have to do if you are going to be any good. To me a big part is just mental toughness and being able to -- like tonight nothing was going well basically.

We were playing pretty well on defense, and then they get that drive for a touchdown. So all of a sudden it's 10 instead of 3. Quite frankly, at halftime there wasn't a lot to be enthused about in general. Nobody let that get to them, and that was 30 minutes, and the point was we still have 30 more minutes.

I doubted we were going to go out there and just start running up and down the field and playing with great proficiency. It would have been great if that happened. Can't count on that, so you just have to keep finding ways to win, but it all starts with guys playing tough, and they have to play with great effort.

And you have to have some belief in there, too, and that's across the ball offense with defense and defense with offense, special teams. We work with quality people. So I think it's a little bit easier. I go back to that point I made earlier. Our best guys have to be our best guys, and it doesn't get any better than Jay Higgins. It doesn't get any better than go right down through all those seniors.

Then look at a guy like Kaleb who a year ago was up and down, a little hot and cold, and he made the play of the game tonight. One of the plays of the game. Just the maturity and the growth that we've seen in him a year later, too, we talked about with Drew, but I can say the same thing about Kaleb.

It was a phenomenal play. You can't draw that one up. It's just a guy doing something extra, and that's how you win games like this because it was tough tonight. Really tough.

**Q. Is Brian Allen was a surprise injury. Was that a serious thing?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been, I don't want to say nursing, but he's been playing with something that's been problematic, and he just decided this week he can't go any further.

He has a couple of surgeries waiting for him. One will be sometime next week, I believe. Then another one in January probably. So he'll be out this spring. It was all medical.

**Q. Then I want to ask about Jackson Stratton. He has been the hot topic, but he hasn't been asked about today. Was Brendan available, or was he emergency-only? How did you feel --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Emergency is a strong word, but he was available, but not mobile, really mobile. He's still sore. I don't think the medical staff thought he would make it this

far, but he had a good week other than just how long would he last, that type of deal. Perfect scenario is keep him out.

Then the one thing I'll circle back to Jackson, clean. No turnovers, right? He's touching that ball every -- I think he dropped the first snap of the second half. That was not real encouraging, but he just kept in there and gave us a chance to win.

**Q. I know you may not want to talk about this, but you're one win away from tying Woody Hayes. How do you feel about that, or have you thought much about it?**

KIRK FERENTZ: A, I haven't thought much about it, and I can tell you, I just wish it would happen. If it is going to happen, I wish it would happen only so everybody can stop talking about the damn thing. I never got into it for this.

There's an old movie "Being There." I'm going way back, like early '80s or '70s. Peter Sellers. I have to go back and look at it because I thought it was a cool movie. Chauncey, the gardener, right, got hit by the queen's car, whatever. Next thing you know he is the advisor. That's my life's story right there. I'm a line coach and ended up being here.

So if it does happen, it actually will be kind of amusing. Like how the hell did that happen? It would be amusing, but we'll see.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Kaleb Johnson. That was his 10th touchdown of 20-plus yards. From where he was on opening day and where I guess you were on opening day to today --**

KIRK FERENTZ: How about that? We were both sitting in the penalty box.

**Q. It looked like he could have gone either way that a lot of players just, Oh, forget, it I'm done. But he chose the other route, and he has always been effusive with his praise of his teammates. I guess could you speak to his maturity over three-plus months and then also his immense talent that he's displayed this year.**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll go back to that Earl Weaver thing about doghouses. He's always been a great young guy. Just needed a little bit more guidance maybe and some firmness. That's our jobs.

Like it or not, and maybe in this day and age that's not popular, but my theory is most good players the ones I've been around for 40-some years, most good players want to be coached. Sometimes they have a funny way of

showing it, but they want to be coached.

His teammates were supportive of the plan. The most important ingredient of everything is Kaleb is a quality guy who wants to be a really good football player, and he has demonstrated that week in and week out. His consistency and performance has been great. You guys don't get to see him during the week. He is upbeat, positive.

Any ups and downs that we may have gone through, it's been worth it because it's just so fun to see him be confident and act like a football player, a real football player.

That play he made tonight, I don't know if that was you, Matt, or somebody said it was Cooper DeJean's play, except this one counted. We got the points on the board, but what a phenomenal effort. Same thing with Cooper's thing last year.

To see that part of it is gratifying, and just so happy for him and his success and appreciative.

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