

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Coach Kirk Ferentz

### Press Conference

KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon, everybody. Just to start out, looking backwards for a few seconds here and then we'll move on to this game.

As I said Saturday, it was good to get the win first and foremost. Overall I was pleased with the guys' preparation. I thought our guys were focused and certainly gave great effort, and really it's the first time we've gone through game competition, live work and various situations that come up.

I thought there were a lot of good things, certainly a lot of things to clean up, special teams overall played pretty well for the first time out. I thought we tackled pretty well. The tempo of the offensive line, the tempo they played at was a good start for us.

A lot of things there, certainly a lot of things to get better at, and now the whole idea is to push to improve, like it is every week basically.

Monday morning, we shifted our attention fully to this football game and start our preparation.

Captains will be Ethan Hurkett, Koen Entringer, Logan Jones and Mark Gronowski.

Medically, we are kind of where we stood Saturday night, Kamari Moulton will not be able to play. Vander Zee will be out, and Bryce George, who got injured in pregame, he'll be out, too. I don't see those guys having any chance to play.

Iowa State is off to a really strong start, two very different situations, but looked impressive in both of them. First game playing against a very good Big 12 team in Kansas State. Really good, competitive game, and Iowa State did a great job handling that.

Then traveling back here, some people I know were worried about the jet lag, all that stuff, and it didn't seem to affect them, they played really well Saturday against South Dakota. They're off to a really good start, not a big surprise. They're a really good football team, worthy of



their ranking.

Overall, a really well-coached team. They're good where it counts and veteran where it counts, and strong in all three phases.

That's kind of what we're looking at here.

Offensively, they're veteran, deep in the offensive line. Seven-eight guys that have played a lot of football for them. Quarterback, obviously, has played a lot of good, winning football and a big part of them winning is his performance.

They have good backs, veteran backs that run tough. Really strong at the tight end position, as I think you know, and lost two NFL receivers last year, but seem to have guys coming right along that are very capable there.

Defensively, not as many returning starters, but a lot of guys that have played a lot of football, and a couple of the guys that we'll see Saturday didn't play against us over the last two years, injuries, what have you, but a lot of guys that have played a lot of football. It's a tough scheme to prepare for. They're aggressive, tackle well and don't give us easy plays. That's kind of what you're looking at there.

Then special teams, they're an outstanding special teams group as well. They have really good specialists in this game, two good punters, obviously two good field goal kickers and good return guys on both sides. Both teams I think work hard at that. A good match-up that way.

Kid Captain is James Hall, a five-year-old from Dyersville, home of the Haight brothers, and when he was one year old he was diagnosed with two very unusual brain tumors, very unusual, and went through chemo and radiation down here, treatment, and steroid treatment on top of that. Got to ring the bell in 2022, but unfortunately the tumor has reappeared, so he's going through ongoing treatment right now. As active as possible as a kindergartner, and we're going to be thinking about him and his family certainly over the weekend.

It's our first road game, obviously a big challenge for us.

I want to take one second and give credit to our state. For a state of our size to have two programs that are really

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strong programs I think is a credit to everybody involved, and I think a tip of the hat certainly to our high school football here. Both our teams have a high percentage of guys on the roster from the state of Iowa. I think it speaks to the coaching in the high school programs which have always been strong in this state, but I think everybody can be really proud of that fact.

Shifting back to the game; it's going to be, my guess, a close game. Five of the last five games have been separated by four points on the average. It's kind of indicative of this series, two good teams, and we're going to have to certainly be at our best to have a chance in this one going on the road. That's where we're at right now, and I'll throw it out for questions.

**Q. How accurate is the perception that teams make their most growth from week 1 to week 2? Is that adage accurate in your experience, and what do you see from your guys this week in that regard?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it can be, but it's not automatic, and like most things that happen, you have to make that happen really. Especially in our program, like historically, this has been a big month for us, not just this week but a big month for us in terms of development. We're probably a little bit alike, both our teams are, and you've got some guys playing now that maybe haven't played. They've played football but not in the roles that they're playing. We certainly have a lot of those types of guys.

Getting on the field, having that first game experience is really critical, and then if you take something out of that and learn from it, just how to prepare better, and then certainly compete better on Saturday, hopefully you're taking a step forward, and that's really the biggest goal, I think, for all of us right now.

Hopefully we'll take that step, but I think it really gets back to how you practice, how you prepare, the time that you invest. Big difference from this week and last is -- at least for our first opponent this year, we're looking at a bunch of film that you wonder how pertinent it is, whereas Iowa State has got an identity, so anything you see on them, even from last year, it's going to have value.

We kind of know their roster. They kind of know ours, too, just because of the familiarity over the years.

**Q. This morning George Raveling died. He was obviously here when you were O-line coach. I wonder if your paths crossed very much or if you had any anecdotes or anything to share about him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I didn't hear that. I'm sorry to hear that. I

have his book in my office, actually. It was given to me this past year. I'm eager to read it. People that knew him better just say what an amazing human being he was, first and foremost. He did a lot of really neat things in his lifetime.

I know there's a lot of stuff in there that I'm curious to read.

When I think of George Raveling, one thing I think of is there's a young man, Brian Jones, who's in the media, and I typically see him at the Big Ten Media Day. He visited here. He ended up going to UCLA, young guy from Texas, high school player from Texas, and Coach Raveling spent a significant time with him. It was like a 45-minute visit with him and then sent about a two-page letter that I got a copy somewhere, so it just kind of gives you a little bit of indication he was a total team player in the department here, and I can't remember what led to what, why we asked him to visit with Brian, but he did, and that was his follow up to it.

I don't pretend to know him well, but from everything I've heard he's just an amazing human being. Sorry to hear that.

**Q. What were the conversations like with Mark over the last couple days? He's bounced back really strong throughout his career. He's played in a lot of big games. Is it one of those games where you just sort of remind him what he's capable of doing, or how have you approached the last couple of days with him?**

KIRK FERENTZ: A couple thoughts. I don't want to say underestimate, but to me what we saw Saturday was a guy who wants to really do well, and it was not his first game in college football but first game at Iowa, and that means something to him. I think that's what we all saw.

Yeah, the other quarterback who I always think about who probably played a little bit too much of the game during the day before a game started would be Drew Tate. Drew ran pretty hot, and it was a little bit easier to see with Drew. Mark hides it a little bit better.

But my take was he was a little bit anxious and pressing too hard. I actually said something to him yesterday morning. The first ball he threw out there was a hitch to the left I believe it was, and landed about eight feet in front of the receiver. He's probably thrown 100, probably 1,000 of those things and thrown them well. That's just indicative of what was going on, I think.

Good to get that first game done, and really looking forward to him leading the team Saturday.



**Q. Do you have any sense for timetable on Kamari of when he could be back?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Probably a couple weeks, I'm guessing, but I don't want to pin it down because I really don't know. But definitely not this week. He's doing fine, but it's going to take some time.

**Q. Last year Rocco kind of had his way a little bit in terms of the passing game. What makes you believe that the secondary is ready to meet that challenge?**

KIRK FERENTZ: We're going to find out. They had a couple excellent receivers, but it's a different attack now -- they don't have guys at that position that are going to the NFL this year, but they have good players there, and they went out and got some guys that can help them. But they have some tight ends that if they were draft eligible would probably have that chance.

They're doing a great job with what they do, and they always have. But the common denominator there is the quarterback. He's done a really good job. He plays like a veteran. He did that at a young age.

His poise is impressive. Just the way he runs the team and doesn't make big mistakes is impressive. So we're going to have to be at our best.

We're a different group than we were last year, too, so it's a whole new match-up, and the challenge is us getting ready this week knowing that it's going to be tough.

**Q. I wanted to ask about how Mark has responded. I know you mentioned that obviously he's played a bunch of ball, but what has he been like since Saturday?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Same as he was before. It wasn't how he wanted to play, or the game didn't turn out the way he wanted it to. But he's going to be fine. He's totally qualified, and he can play quarterback. Just got to relax and play and just let the game come to him a little bit instead of trying to force things or getting a little jazzed up.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the three O-linemen that got their first real big-time game experience with Trevor and Dotzler and also Pieper. What did you think of their performance?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I was pleased. Counting on the other guys to play well, but yeah, certainly very curious, like everybody, to see what those guys were going to do. Pieper played a little bit last year, but it was as an extra lineman, that type of deal. So it was his first time to go out

there and start, and I thought he played as a really high tempo, and I thought both tackles did a great job, too. They've clearly improved from a year ago.

It's going to keep getting tougher as we go along, but I think they got some confidence out of what they did. They learned that they can play, and now it's just a matter of trying to build on some good things that they did Saturday and each week hopefully taking some steps forward, and if they slip at all, then get back on their feet and go back to work.

**Q. Even with Kamari out you have three running backs, as we saw on Saturday, who are capable of making big plays. Do we expect to see Xavier get the bulk of the carries or are we going to see kind of an equal rotation of three guys as of right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll see how it all goes. I thought all three guys did a nice job on Saturday. We went into the game unsure because we had four guys at that point we felt pretty good about, and the one common denominator, and I think Jazz is Jazz, like I think we've got a good grip on who he is and what he is, and he played well Saturday. He's a little bit more veteran, or the most veteran of the guys. T.J. is not as veteran at running back, but I think is very capable, and it was good for Xavier to get out there and get hit, get tackled, that type of thing, so those are all positives.

McNeil snuck in there for a little bit, and that was positive as well. My guess is we're going to need all four of them moving forward, and we'll see how the games play out.

**Q. A big milestone coming up, so I'd like to ask a bigger picture perspective question. You are the highest paid public employee in the state. You've got 70,000 people every week kind of living and dying with the Hawkeyes and it's basically a professional football sport. Then on the other side you're sort of an adoptive father for 100 plus guys, charged with taking them away from their hometown and developing them into young men. I know those two responsibilities aren't necessarily opposed, but they're certainly not working together. Through 27 years of doing this, how have you been able to balance that, and how has the perspective changed in the last few years?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a little bit of -- you referenced salaries and things like that. It's kind of like I tell our players, business is business, but football is football. My approach when I got here 27 years ago, my goal was to build this hopefully like a good high school football program. I say that in the most endearing way because I just -- growing up that was one of the best experiences I

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ever had in my life was playing high school football for two outstanding head coaches that really were very different but I looked up to both of them and one of them ended up being probably one of my biggest mentors of my entire life.

That's what I do. Hopefully that's what I do, and that's where I try to direct my energy and focus.

The best part about football is the people that you get to work with and the day-to-day, quite frankly. But you have to take care of the other stuff that you referenced. That's part of the job, too.

But the part I enjoy is the actual coaching and just being with people that are kind of like-minded, I guess, and trying to work toward something.

**Q. You've now won your last six games at Jack Trice. I know every team is different, but are there similarities or themes that you can draw upon that has led to success up there?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, when you go on the road you really have to have an ability to block things out and just focus on what's important, and there's a lot more things to probably get distracted by when you go on the road than maybe at home.

Although in some cases there's something nice about being on the road, too, because people aren't hitting you up for tickets or -- I guess they hit my wife up on that stuff anyway. But there's less distractions in some ways when you're actually on the road.

But the bottom line is, just like the comments about the point differential, whether it's here or there, it's going to be a hard-fought game. That's what history has shown.

We've lost some tough ones over there, too. I can stand here -- I don't -- well, I do know why I thought of it. I actually thought of it on Saturday, a ball down the sideline where we had a pass interference, looked like a carbon copy from whatever year that was, '07 or whatever year that was.

Yeah, just a lot of tough moments and hopefully some good ones, and I just know this: To have a good one you've really got to earn it. It's tough.

**Q. Went a little easier in 2015 compared to the '07 reference there. I was talking to Riley McCarron the other day about his score, first career touchdown in Ames and the decision I think at the time, everyone expected Jordan or Leshon are going to carry this out, Marshall Koehn is going to walk it off with a field goal.**

**Do you remember the discussion between you and Greg Davis about taking a shot there with two and change left and just what a moment that was to have a walk-on from Dubuque score that and C.J. was having a heck of a game too?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, C.J. played a great game, and Riley was just a great football player, and he's doing pretty well right now. I think he's in Kansas City. I'm not too worried about him. He's a pretty sharp guy. But yeah, it was a great, great moment.

There were a lot of big plays in that game, certainly, and Greg did a great job calling it. But another game where it wasn't easy. Just one of those things.

It's kind of been the fun part about you just never know who's going to emerge, who's going to step up and make the big play or be a story in each and every series or every game. Might be another story this week hopefully.

**Q. I wanted to go back to the offense in general. Having relied so much on the fun game, is there any sort of advantage or silver lining knowing that Iowa State doesn't have a lot of your passing game and what Mark can do as a quarterback through the air heading into this week at all?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, I would have been okay if we threw the ball better Saturday. I could say the same thing about the last two years, quite frankly. That's going to come. It's going to come.

I guess in some ways maybe it is -- they've got enough film to see from last year. Just like I said, their event film is valuable to us; I think it's going to be valuable to them as well. Then what we can do beyond that is really the unknown.

I'm not sure we know yet either. Hopefully it's something that we can grow and develop and get better at.

I'll say this, too: Running the ball is no easy trick against these guys. We hit a couple last year, but boy, sometimes it's feast or famine. There's a lot of famine when you play these guys. They make it tough.

**Q. I know you have more film angles probably than we do, but the receivers were getting open the other day. It seemed like your receivers played pretty well despite not getting the ball. Did you see that as well on the film and that's maybe an opportunity this week?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we're better. Certainly we're better than we've been at that position, more mature.





Hopefully whether it's protection or not seeing a guy, that type of thing, hopefully we can do a little better job there, and we're going to have to do that moving forward, period, not just this week but the next 11.

**Q. With Trevor getting the start, can you just describe kind of the growth you've seen from him over the last couple years, and what did he do during fall camp to earn that spot?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It was a really good competition. I'll start by saying that. Both guys -- I don't want to say it's just 100 percent even, but it was close. It was really back and forth.

Jack has grown immensely, too, so both those guys I referenced I think the other night. Jack really struggled in that last open practice a year ago in the spring. I say a year ago last April. So the growth that he's -- but the stuff he didn't do well that night or that afternoon, it was more mental, if you will, just I think he was a little bit too excited and lost sight of his fundamental stuff. But he played better that way on Saturday, and I think we saw growth there.

Trevor has just been very steadily climbing the ladder like you hope a young guy does. There was a time when we used to try to bring guys along a year or two and then let them start playing. A couple years ago all of a sudden you've got Connor Colby in there playing probably before he was ready, Mason; two guys that made NFL teams probably are playing before they're ready. It's tough duty, especially at this level, in our conference, Big 12. It's really hard.

Trevor has taken a more conventional path like we're used to, and I'm not saying he's out of the woods yet, but that was a big step for him to get out there and have some success and game experience.

**Q. In terms of the offense over the weekend, seemed a little vanilla. I was just wondering if that was by design and if you hope to open things up, as opposed to a team that you've seen a lot of already, how can that help against Iowa State?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, still gets down to our execution. We didn't do everything, and hopefully there's more stuff we can do. But a lot of it just gets back to doing well with the basic stuff. If you can do that over the course of a season, you have a chance. We may have a little bit more in our game plan, but you've still got to execute against a really challenging defense. Those guys, first of all, they just play hard, flat-out play hard. They shifted the scheme that they play now, I think that was in '18, and it's been really good to them. They've been playing really good

defense.

Part of the secret of their defense is the time of possession of their offense. They do a really nice job of winning that battle typically week to week, which is -- any defensive coach will tell you that's one of their best friends is time of possession with their offensive side, the flipside of it.

They just play good complementary football, and it's going to be a challenge for us. Got to make all the possessions count, quite frankly.

**Q. Kirk, Dom Orange seems like he's the anchor of that Iowa State defensive line, maybe the defense as a whole. How have you seen him progress over the last couple years and what stands out to you about him as a player?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, basically good continual growth. Just each year he's gotten better and better. He's a big guy, but he's a big guy who plays well. There's a difference. There's a lot of big guys out there -- not a lot, but there is in college football, but not all of them play well, and he's really done a good job. Right in the middle you've got two good players with our guy and their guy, and both guys will have their hands full. It should be a good match-up. But he's a guy we have a lot of respect for. All their guys up front play hard, too.

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