

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Appreciate everybody being here. I'll take a minute to look back at the weekend and then move on to week's game. As I said Saturday, disappointing outcome, and that hasn't changed. Anytime you lose a game, it's the lowest of lows, and it's a sting that sticks with everybody pretty much throughout the weekend. It is what it is.

As I said Saturday, I thought our team prepared well. I thought they were focused Saturday and played with good effort. Both teams did. The bottom line is we came up short three points against a good team.

Certainly disappointing, but like every Sunday, you work through it, come in, look at the film, see what you can learn and see what lessons we can take out of it, and then most importantly you've got to flip the page and start progressing hopefully growing and improving as a result of that.

Good to be back on the field Monday. Pretty much the same routine as we've used the last 10 years now. Put things to bed on Sunday, and Monday morning get back on the field and move on to the next team. That's a good thing, I think, for us physically as well as mentally, we have to push forward and get things going.

Shifting to UMass we have the same four captains as the first two games: Koen Entringer, Ethan Hurkett, Logan Jones and Mark Gronowski.

Medically, pretty much the same as last week; we won't have Moulton and Vander Zee, and then Addison Ostrenga, unfortunately, is out for the season. That's been confirmed.

It's really unfortunate. Addison is a great young guy, and you hate to have anybody certainly lose playing time, and he's one of our senior guys, leader, and just a tremendous young person. That's certainly disappointing.

UMass has an outstanding coach. We've got a background with Joe from being at Minnesota and being at Rutgers most recently, so familiar with his work. He's a

defensive coach. He's an outstanding coach; was a head coach at Maine on top of that. A little bit of familiarity there in terms of philosophical approach to the game.

Offensively, their coordinator and offensive line coach both have experience at Northwestern, so schematically they have a feel for at least what they're doing, and unlike our first game, we've got two game films with their team, so you get a chance their personnel and them executing what they do.

Then pertaining to the roster, it's like a lot of things now in college football with the new rules, new staffs come in, huge roster turnover, and the coaches have, as I understand it, the right to release players and then obviously the portal and all that type of thing.

Long story short, they have a lot of guys from a lot of different places on their team, so we're just trying to piece all that together, a lot of new faces, and taking a look at the film and working from there.

As we push forward, basically this week is like any week; our goal is to win the game and then secondly to improve and grow and see what we can do to move forward as a football team.

Our Kid Captain this week, Gwendolyn Clouse is a young seven-year old from Cedar Rapids. She'll be with us on Saturday. At age three months she was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition, and as I understand it, most kids that have this don't see their first birthday. It's a serious thing.

She is a seven-year old now in first grade and doing well, and as I understand it, anytime there is a flare-up, the treatment, her team over there, the care team at the Stead Family Hospital has done a great job addressing those things. Loves the outdoors, loves being outside and enjoys going to the pool, and she's doing really well. So it'll be great to have her and her two brothers and her mom and dad here on Saturday as well.

It'll be good to be back in Kinnick. Certainly expect a good crowd. Night games are always kind of special. Good to get back on the field and have a chance to move forward.

I'll throw it out for questions.

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Q. You mentioned Coach Harasymiak is also a former head coach from Maine. What are some of the biggest lessons during your time in Orono, and what would be your advice to a guy who's in a similar position as you were 27 seasons ago?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think he knows what to do. He's done this before, and he's been around football. He's probably a little more seasoned than I was when I went to Maine. There are a lot of things you learn, and the good news is a lot of the mistakes I made that nobody really noticed because they were more interested in hockey or maybe some other things going on there.

You learn a lot. It's like every shot, every day when you're doing something; if it's a challenge, there's always something to learn. The value of putting a staff together is probably my biggest takeaway from that experience. I think it was one of the things I learned here as an assistant, the value of putting a good staff together. We certainly had that here in the '80s with Coach Fry. Made a mistake or two in hiring up there. One of them is I think it's important to hire people that fit at your place, not just in terms of philosophy and all that type of thing, but also are a good fit for where you're coaching at and having a grasp of that. That was one takeaway.

It was a great three years for me. Really enjoyed it, and Kevin White, the guy that hired me, is a tremendous athletic director. You meet a lot of good people and have friends to this day that are still up in that state.

Q. Are you happy with the downfield passing game right now, and how do you get that to maybe click and be a threat to opposing defenses maybe more consistently?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we're working on that. We're working on everything right now. We're 1-1 right now, so not happy with a lot of things. That's kind of the nature of the beast. We scored 13 points; we have to do better moving forward.

But they're a good defensive football team, too. There's a lot of things you have to factor in there. I thought we made some improvements on Saturday. We grew from week 1. In the passing game, it was not good week 1. We talked about that a week ago. We'll keep pushing forward and continue to grow.

Two things going on there. I think our players get more comfortable as we move forward, and then also we learn more. It's one key takeaway, I think; anytime you look early in the season as a staff, if we're not learning about

the current group of players that we have, and you learn through camp, you learn every day, you learn going back to January, but getting in game competition, you learn a little bit more about what's good and what's not so good, and it's a process, and it's been that way as long as I've been coaching. That's kind of what we're going through right now.

Q. I know we've talked a lot about just Mark's play in general, but there was a handful of drops against Iowa State. What are you seeing in terms of receiving game, tight ends? What's your evaluation of how they're playing on the other end of things of Mark?

KIRK FERENTZ: Saturday is a good illustration, and you just brought up a good point. There were a lot of things going on. It wasn't one player necessarily. A lot of the things I saw that were maybe a little bit uncharacteristic. I don't know if it was the step up in terms of atmosphere, competition, all those types of things. It was a little tougher challenge than being at home on a game that was fairly comfortable.

There were a lot of things. Mark dropped a shotgun snap, and that probably killed us on a 3rd down attempt. We had a chance to have it open and hit it, and just a simple routine thing there. So all those little things really add up.

Throw special teams in there, too; that's normally a strength for us, and it didn't really do much to help us in the game the other day.

The combination of all those things, they all go together, and yeah, dropped balls are going to help deter an offense's progression, and that's not a good thing. Just little basic execution, and that's usually what the game comes down to, especially in games like that where you have two competitive teams. Flip it over and list some things on the other side of the ball, too.

You've just got to keep pushing forward.

Q. Two-fold question, what is the nature of Addison's injury, and DJ Vonnahme is going to have to step into a larger role, maybe Thomas Meyer - he traveled with you guys - what can you tell us about both those guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll start with those guys. They both have done a good job. We've gotten a much shorter glimpse at Thomas, obviously, because we only know him from August on basically. He trained here in June and July, but football-wise saw him starting at the start of August here, late July I guess technically.



Then DJ is a guy that we've just seen take step after step after step. He's a converted player. He's now playing tight end. That's what we projected him as. The one question, especially he's a former quarterback, is he going to block, how will he block. He's done a really good job there, and he's changed his body on top of it.

He's a guy that we feel good about, and now due to injury he's going to be pressed further into his role and grow a little bit, and that's good. That's fine. He'll handle it well. He's done a nice job, not only offensively but special teams this segment here. So that's good. And Thomas will continue to grow. We'll throw more at him right now, too.

Addy unfortunately has an achilles injury, so they repaired that yesterday, and is on the road to recovery.

Q. I wanted to ask a little bit about the UMass coaching staff considering Harasymiak just came from Rutgers, coached at Minnesota, his defensive coordinator has Big Ten experience, offensive coordinator was at Northwestern for a few years. Does that open up the film that you guys could potentially look at and evaluation even though it's not the same players?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, that's helpful. It certainly is helpful. The first game this year was a little bit different because it was just -- not that familiarity. But yeah, there's some certain DNA. You could argue Rutgers and Minnesota have a lot in common defensively. Not carbon copy and not Michigan State because that's kind of spread around a little bit.

So yeah, there is some familiarity, and then it's a matter of what wrinkles they're using that maybe they weren't using previously. And in Joe's case, he's got a new team, so it's not like he was at Minnesota or Rutgers prior to that where he was used to working with the guys he's working with.

You can see they're trying to build something there and getting guys just to understand the concepts and play the basics well. We've been down that road, too, and you kind of go through that anytime you have new players, as well, but yeah, there is some familiarity there. So that helps, yeah.

Q. I can't think of many new coaches that had a more inauspicious debut than you did when you were here, to go 2-18, have the games against good teams that you had, and then the injuries, Sam Aiello, all of that. What did you take away from that, maybe intangible-wise, that you had to learn or you wouldn't have learned if you didn't experience that, and how has that helped guide you to your career as you've reached

this point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, the Sam Aiello one almost broke me. That's the one that almost got me. If you can survive the 2-18, if you can survive it, then hopefully you are learning. You have to learn from everything you do.

I think what you learn is that you do what you do. At some point you've got to believe in something, and you try to stick to your principles. We adjust them, not weekly, but we try to look at what we're doing all the time and just see if there's better ways to do things.

But at some point you've got to believe in something, and fortunately I guess when I came here, there were enough things I had experienced as a coach that I think were just like non-negotiable; we need to be doing these things. So we've tried to stay true to those core principles, and you just try to stick true to who you are, and you have to realize, too, and I think if there's one good thing about failing, you realize that's part of growth, that's part of life. If you're doing something challenging, which this is certainly a challenging endeavor.

Good does come with bad, and you've got to work through it and see what you can learn from it. As long as you're learning something, it's not a total loss. But if you're not learning or if it breaks your will or you start surrendering, then it's just not going to end well.

Q. What are those core principles?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, certain things, about the way we do things fundamentally and what we deem to be important in the program, certain values, whether it's what are the things that we want to hang our hat on and what are the things that are just ultimately not going to -- if you cave in, it's ultimately going to get you. The basics are the basics. You show up with a good attitude, you work hard, be on time, have a good attitude, work hard, and hopefully you learn as you go. If you do that, you typically will grow and get better.

Q. Mark has something around a 54 percent completion percentage. It's only two games, of course. In short, do you feel your offense is matching his skill set, if that makes sense?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's what I was alluding to earlier. I think we're learning about him, he's learning about us. Right now, grab on to percentages -- I'll go back to that first throw he threw, that hitch well short of the receiver that he's probably completed 1,000 of those in his lifetime. It's a matter of fact, but that's not who he is. So it's just a matter of him getting more comfortable and us doing a

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better job of maybe making him more comfortable, and that's part of the process as you go along.

I think about some of the good quarterbacks we've had, I'll go way back to Brad Banks, nobody knew who he was, and then after three games they did know who he was and nobody liked him, and probably -- I don't know if Drew Tate was getting rave reviews after Arizona State. It's just part of the process. When you're getting on the field and going through things, you're learning as you go, and my attitude is we look more at the big picture, there's 12 games scheduled, we're going to take it a week at a time. As long as we're growing and getting better and moving forward, we'll live with the results, and that's really all you can do.

Q. What do you mean by making more comfortable? Are there certain routes, certain ways you run things that would make him feel more comfortable?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, I think every quarterback, that's part of the exchange hopefully. He and Tim talk all the time. That's what every quarterback does with the quarterback coach and the play caller. Yeah, there's certain things you feel good about and certain things you don't feel good about. That's part of putting a game plan in.

That's a weekly process but also week to week. Certain things become more and more evident, and you try to -- if you're doing it right, you try to tailor make things toward the players' abilities.

It's interesting, I just saw a headline, I haven't read the article yet, it's on my desk in there, I think it was in the Wall Street times, it's about the Steelers tearing up their playbook. My guess is Arthur Smith has got a playbook that includes a lot of things, and it's just you do what your players allow you to do. You want to set your players up for success. That's part of the process as you go along each week hopefully you're being a little bit smarter about things.

Q. I know you guys have been dealt relatively interesting injury situation obviously with now Addison out, Reece Vander Zee, but I want to go back to the Iowa State game. It looked like there were a handful of routes on 3rd and 6, 3rd and 7, guys maybe only running about five yards out. I'm curious from your insight, is that the route concept, is that the receiver not knowing where they're at, is it the defense taking some things away? Take me through your thought process when you looked at the film on that.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, first of all, as you might imagine, if we need six, we typically don't run routes at four or five

hopefully. Hopefully we don't have those calls matched up.

Yeah, a lot of times it's one of the big takeaways from Saturday, quite frankly. I mentioned special teams really didn't do much to help us in the game, and that is uncharacteristic. Usually we at least hold our own or get an edge there, and I'm not sure we did that Saturday. So that's part of the deal.

What you're referring to there, I wouldn't disagree with that or the drops. But usually it's a matter of people pressing. I've sat in a million meetings where the one piece of feedback you hear all the time is hey, the receiver was a little short, and that's the John Wooden "be quick, don't hurry" deal in my opinion, and sometimes the harder guys try, the more they lack out on that, and that's flipping over on defense, too.

One of our issues Saturday at times was leverage, and there was one play in particular I thought was a huge play in the game that we had defended but our leverage wasn't quite where it needed to be, and it's a matter of inches, and those little inches make a difference.

That's the challenge in the game. The tempo is high, so can you get to where you've got to get, whether it's a route depth or a point you are on the opposition of the guy that's trying to block you.

When you lose those little things, it opens the door for maybe an extra yard or two, and those sometimes can be really big plays in the game, and that's part of the deal. The big play in the game was that tipped pass that was just a great play by Burkle, who made a great reception on it. On one hand, kind of lucky, but on the other hand, great play by their guy, great effort, and that's part of football, too.

Q. On Saturday obviously the run game is the strength right now offensively, and this is the last non-Big Ten game of the regular season. How do you balance the run game is the strength but it's also a chance to try to gain some confidence and some momentum in the passing game? How do you balance that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, our approach, just in general terms, is going to be -- again, I don't know what's going to come up in three weeks or four weeks or what we're going to look like at that point, but typically every game we'd rather be balanced, and that's going to be our approach going in, at least hopefully, unless you'd rather just step on a land mine. We've been down that road, too, so then you have to do what you have to do to win a game. But an ideal situation, what we're trying to do is be balanced, and that will be our approach Saturday. We want to run and throw the ball effectively, and throwing play action but also



drop-backs, and how much drop-back you do or don't do depends on your team and also the game, but going into the game we've got to be prepared to do all those things, and hopefully we'll be able to do some of that stuff again and do a little better. Just keep moving it forward.

Q. I wanted to follow up about Dunker and Beau Stephens. They're good to go?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they've practiced two days now, so they're good.

Q. I wanted to ask about slow mesh. I know we talked about it a little bit after the game, but are you feeling comfortable with running that? I know you guys only ran it twice. What do you think about including that, especially while you mention Mark is trying to figure some things out with chemistry and all that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we wanted to run it Saturday if we feel like it's going to help us a little bit, and then how much or how little probably depends on how things go as we move forward. But yeah, we think it's something worth investing time in. We have invested time in it. Unless there's a good reason, we're going to keep it in there and just see how it goes week to week and that type of deal. It hasn't really eaten up much time. It doesn't take away from a lot of the other things that we want to do as well. We'll just keep it as part of the offense, and whether or not it growing or shrinks we'll see as we go along. I don't know at this point.

Q. I wanted to ask about linebackers because I know Jack Campbell was off the charts in so many different areas physically and mentally and it all caught up at the end. Jay, his instincts were off the charts as well. Athletically -- nobody is Jack Campbell, but he was as good as you possibly could be for the body he has. Your two guys seem to have caught up. I thought week 1 to week 2 their instincts were better, they were quicker. How are they progressing to where you want them to be in that position?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, same thing. We'll take that week by week. But so far, so good. Point-wise we've played pretty well. It's whatever it is, I think 23 points, I think, in two games. But yeah, seeing some good things. More importantly, how they're playing their positions, and I think both are doing a good job.

There were a couple times where Karson almost got out -- well, he was out of control a little bit Saturday, and he plays fast. So just learning how to settle a little bit as he gets closer to the ball, closer to making a play. That will probably help him a little bit.

But you'd rather coach a guy back then have to coach him forward that way. I don't take that as a negative.

We'll just see what happens here, but I think so far, so good, and Jaxon Rexroth played quite a bit Saturday, too, and he's done a good job.

Q. Pardon me if you were asked this on Saturday, but you've got 4th and 2 in the second quarter and the third quarter, both in Iowa State territory with a running quarterback like Gronowski. Looking back at the film, did you have any considerations you would go for that on 4th down?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not in either situation, no. I think we went for at least one or two, also went and converted one, I believe, or two. I can't remember now.

I'm not second-guessing on the ones we did the other day, given the circumstances we were in.

Q. Overall your defense has limited the explosive plays. What has impressed you most about what you've seen from them through two games, and what more do you want to see from them as well?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think they're off to a good start that way, and points are the most important stat defensively. Sometimes getting off the field a little quicker would be a good thing and give the offense -- that was a big part of the second half the other day. We went into the game knowing they're a good ball position team. They've been that way several years.

It ended up just about dead even Saturday. I think we had an edge by 20 seconds. But it didn't feel that way in the second half. Just it was kind of we had it a lot in the third quarter and then they had it a lot in the fourth quarter.

Anytime you want to get off the field as fast as you can and give the offense another possession if possible, but I think overall, we're on a good track right now. It's like our whole team, the whole thing is to show improvement, growth and improvement, and that's where our focus is in all three areas right now.

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