

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

Tuesday, November 11, 2025

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. We want to recognize Veterans Day, certainly. I mentioned that to our team this morning and just talked about the significance of that. It's good to have everybody here.

Looking back real quickly on Saturday, I thought our team really competed hard. This type of play, this level of play, there's always a handful of plays. This kind of truism in sports never changes. It was a really narrow margin, a couple of close calls, some things we wish we could do differently, but you don't get take-overs obviously.

Bottom line is I thought our team really competed hard. Good opportunity on Sunday to go back and look at the tape and see if we can clean some stuff up. Obviously, we had to move forward yesterday. So hit the field and full attention right now is on USC for good reason.

Captains going to this game are the same four guys: Hurkett, Entringer, Gronowski and Logan Jones.

Injury-wise, looks like pretty clear. We have some guys who are sore and beat up certainly from the game last week, a really physical game, hard fought, but I think everybody will be ready to go here.

We have a big challenge ahead of us. USC is having a great season right now. To me, they're playing at a really high level. Coming in -- I don't know if it's quiet or not. I haven't heard a lot of chatter about them. They're sitting there at the top of the league at 5-1. They've been playing really good football all year long.

As you might expect, the roster, they have great size, great speed, great athleticism. No big surprise there. Then beyond that, they're a very well-coached team. Certainly, Coach Riley is a noted offensive coach. He's had great success no matter where he's gone in that regard.

Special teams, the first thing that jumps out at you, they don't punt very much, and they kickoff a lot, which goes back to their offensive success. They're really good in the kicking game, have an excellent kicker, been very

consistent, very productive. Got No. 6 back there, the great receiver, is a punt return guy as well. Obviously, a very dangerous player and a good punter on top of that.

Defensively, they're in the second year of their system, and I think they've made big, big strides there, and to me that's part of the reason they're 7-2. They've always been a potent offensive team and playing really good defense right now. Look back a year ago, they were 6-6, won their bowl game to go 7-6 and right now 7-2. Just playing at a really high level.

A couple of things that jump out at you, I mentioned the defensive play. They run the ball, at least in conference play, 50 yards more a game than they were a year ago and right up there at the top of the conference with Oregon. So doing a really good job there. Quarterback is playing tremendous for them, a really good football player. With that, they had 15 interceptions on the year, and right now they have five. Their quarterback play has been really been on top of that and I think a big difference in this whole thing.

All that being said, we've got a big challenge on our hands. Doing our best to get ready for it right now. Then playing in the Coliseum, a historic venue. I didn't realize it was built as a tribute to the veterans from World War I back in the '20s, a lot of history behind that on top of it.

Our Kid Captain this week is Blake Bonta from Urbandale -- at age 10 he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. They found cancer that spread to his spinal cord, was brought into the Stead Family Hospital, three surgeries that he underwent in ten days. Their family moved into a hotel for about a month, including their dog. It seems like he's doing a lot better now. He's had frequent treatment. Looks like he's in remission, which is obviously a good thing.

Quick side story: When he was in the hospital, started three fund-raisers and has raised over \$100,000 doing that. A pretty amazing young guy, he and his family certainly. He's not playing sports right now, retraining his walking habits and abilities. Sounds like my grandkids, likes Legos, video games, and that type of deal. He's doing a really good job on his recovery.

Ramping it up, great respect for USC, the team they have right now. They're having an excellent season. It's going

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

to be a big challenge for us going out there, all three phases have to be at our absolute best. We'll do our best to finish out the week of preparation and try to get ready for a big challenge.

Q. With three close losses, particularly with this season, how have you seen the leaders on this team, whether it be the four captains or elsewhere, kind of guide some of these younger players that are getting experience, how to continue maturing and moving forward after another close loss this year?

KIRK FERENTZ: It really goes back to January. They've been consistent all the way through. Never sure who's going to emerge as your leaders, and we've got a bunch of them. Certainly we've settled in, and the four captains seem to have done that.

We have a lot of guys right now really doing a good job in that regard. Not all of them are starters. Jayden Montgomery was not a starter, but he's been on the leadership group the entire way through it.

They just come to work every day. They have a great attitude and work hard. They realize there's ups and downs in sports. I think they're certainly setting the bar for everybody else on the football team. Some of the younger guys are better than others, at least cueing in on what to do and how to do it, and that's part of the process too.

No, they've been really good. I think very steady. Based on yesterday and today, nobody's been discouraged. They're working hard, and they know we've got a big challenge on our hands right now.

Q. A couple of your players talked about when you reflected on last year's West Coast trip to UCLA, that you guys may have probably lost the game before it was played, I guess. It felt like the preparation was good, but they just weren't ready to play. What did you kind of learn about going to the West Coast last year? I know it was a Friday night, a little bit different, but how can you kind of make that change heading into this matchup?

KIRK FERENTZ: The West Coast trip a year ago was a night game, and those are a little bit of a challenge, I'll admit that. Honestly, this one is just 2:40 central time if you want to look at it that way. So it's not that big a deal.

I think our issue last year in the UCLA game was more just our approach to the game mentally, in my opinion. They were not a team really interested in running the football a year ago, and I'm not sure they wanted to run the ball against us, quite frankly, until we got into the game, and we

didn't show much interest in playing the run. It just became obvious they needed to stay with it.

Big difference from Saturday, like we had total respect for Oregon in every regard. They were still able to run the ball better than we like, but it wasn't because we weren't ready for it. I didn't think we were ready mentally against UCLA last year in the run game and probably some other areas too where we left some things out there.

To me, it was more about our approach going into that game, than it was where it got played and who we were playing. Our mental approach in this team so far, this 2025 team, each and every week from my vantage point they've really prepared well, and they've gone out and competed with the right attitude. That's what it takes to give yourself a chance to be successful.

Q. Gronowski was telling us that you guys don't specifically practice two-point conversions. I know it's cost you guys in the Iowa State loss last year, cost you this week. What has been your philosophy on two-point plays in terms of practicing them? Has it changed with different coordinators, NFL, any kind of inspiration you've had on that or guidance?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's part of the checklist, and you go through it. We work in the red zone every week obviously, meet on it every week and have a plan for it. To that point, we always practice that. It's going to be something out of that menu, if you will, or that part of the game plan, a specific part of the game plan from the 5-in. So it's going to come out of that playlist typically.

Truth be told, last week Saturday, the point we ended up going to four downs, so it was on the fourth down that we used our best two-point play unfortunately. Maybe if we could have scored on one of the first three plays, then we would have had a good two-point play ready, or at least the best one, so it just didn't work out.

Q. Wanted to ask about Kamari, for how he's reached a new level this year, but at the same time, it seems like he's a shoestring tackle away from a big play, if not one time a game, but a couple times a game. I guess Kaleb Johnson was like that for a little while. How can he reach that next level and make those explosive plays?

KIRK FERENTZ: He's been climbing each year. We've seen him do good things all the way through it. Last year he was the number two back. Kaleb was clearly the number one guy. I think Kamari has subtly improved in every facet of his game. He's always been good in terms of versatility and being well balanced. A little bit stronger



now and more physical than he was a year ago, two years ago certainly. He has good vision, can make good cuts, those types of things.

I don't know if he'll ever be a power runner, but he'll continue to get a little bit better. We've really been pleased with what he's done thus far. I don't think there's any big, dramatic step that he's made, but I think he just continually improves. He's a good back. We're really comfortable any time he's in the game.

Going back to Kaleb last year, I think, as much as anything, it was a matter of focus, which in year 3, that's kind of where the light really came on for him. I think what he learned to do last year was use what he had. He was always a big, strong, powerful guy but didn't always run that way. I think last year he really learned how to use his strengths and abilities to benefit his production.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your message to your defense. Top five statistically in the country, but some of your players have expressed just a little frustration about those final game drives in the losses where they couldn't make that one big play. How do you balance a defense that overall is playing really well, but in those small moments at the end of games, they're a little frustrated, they just can't get over that hump?

KIRK FERENTZ: Stats are great. I'm all for us being up there wherever we are defensively if we're highly ranked. Yeah, it is all about getting the job done. Ultimately the most important stat, two most important stats are points and then wins and losses, which obviously they coincide.

It's kind of like takeaways. We weren't getting a lot of takeaways early, but then we started doing a better job. It's not like you do anything specific, but it's just about playing. I don't think I have to mention that we didn't get those stops to our guys because they know that and it hurts. They're working hard all the time to get better at what they do, and that's certainly part of the game.

We gave ourselves a chance the other day and came back with that drive and got the ball down there and scored and took the lead, but you have to finish it out. There's a lot of things, but again, you can always go back five, six plays that happened during the game that would have affected that situation as well.

There's nothing specific. We'll just try to keep working and getting better. The task doesn't get any easier because we're playing a team that's really good. They can run the ball and throw the ball very effectively. So it's going to be a big challenge for us.

Q. A little deja vu because we're always asking about responding after emotional wins and emotional losses. After nearly 30 years as the head coach, you know what you're doing. What is it that you say that seems to resonate with players about responding and moving on, especially after an emotional loss like last Saturday?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, you never know if it does resonate or not. You never know if you're saying the right thing or not. Time will tell. Believe me, you spend a lot of the week wondering about that and worrying about that quite frankly. If coaching and being involved in the game over time has taught me anything, you have to move on.

I guess it's like real life in some ways. If you're going to go out there and compete, which we do 12 times a year, if you're going to go out there and compete where everyone's got a chance to see and evaluate you, you have to be able to deal with setbacks, and that's a big part of coaching.

I'd offer a little commentary just being asked about that, just in today's climate I worry about that because there's not a lot of forgiveness out there anymore. At least in college football there never has been and pro football.

You're not going to win every day. It's the way it is. My wife reminds me that all the time when we lose a game. Not that you want to hear it, but you're not going to win every game. You're trying like hell to do that. If at some point you can't deal with that, then you probably need to get out.

Yeah, it's natural for it to hurt after the game, on game day, it hurts on Sunday, and then you have to move on. At least with us working on Mondays now instead of the old days we took Monday off. We're forced physically to do it, and that helps the Monday part as well.

Especially this week it's pretty easy, we have a team again that's equally a tough task, which is what we had last week. You'd better get your attention there real quickly. Otherwise, you're putting yourself at a bigger disadvantage going against a tough team. It's our job to try to educate our players to that. That's just how it works. We have to be conveying those messages to our guys.

Q. Lutmer has really grown into a leadership role on this defense. How have you seen him grow into that role?

KIRK FERENTZ: Like a lot of guys, Zach hasn't started a lot of games going into this season. Now he's playing at a really high level. As a coaching staff, we're not surprised

because we thought he was really good when we recruited him, probably under recruited, and then certainly we've gotten to watch him on a daily basis.

A lot of guys on our defense are easy to cherry pick, you think about Karson Sharar, Zach, guys that have been here a little bit, Koen, and now that they're playing, they're playing smarter each and every week because they have a better feel of angles and just how to play and doing it in game conditions. So none of us were surprised. He's a very respected guy too just because of his work ethic and what he does every day.

Yeah, he's part of the group that's really given us good leadership this year.

Q. I asked this a couple weeks ago, but we're a couple weeks later now. Have you guys had discussions recently about Cam Buffington, if he could be in the regular defense? Is he ready to do that, or are you guys still happy with what you have with Montgomery?

KIRK FERENTZ: Jayden's done a great job, and we've still have Jaden Harrell, too, who's getting better with each week. I think probably at this time of the year -- no knock on Cam. Cam's done a lot of good things. Got a pick a couple weeks ago, but those other guys are probably more game ready right now to be playing.

That being said, we have a group of young linebackers we're excited about, and they're doing a great job on special teams. They'll be fine. A lot of them probably could have started last year, too. We had some other guys in there. There's not a big drop-off yet. I think we've got the best guys playing. I feel good about that.

Q. With you guys going out to the West Coast, you're getting an opportunity to give TJ a little bit of a chance to have a homecoming in his senior year with this expanded role, things like that. It's not very often that happens despite the changing landscape of college athletics. To get a player like TJ to get a chance in his senior year starting role, to have that kind of homecoming, what does it mean for you as a coach to get him to develop and celebrate that?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's actually more of a pain in the neck sometimes because of all the ticket requests you get. That aside, I'm sure it's a special thing for him being a native of that state, although Fresno is still three hours away.

Yeah, it's got to be exciting for him. I'm sure he'll have people from his background, his high school, and just his youth coming to the game as well, so it's exciting for him. Probably the biggest concern there is let's make sure we

stay focused on the game, which he will. He's doing a great job of that. It has to be a little bit special for him.

Q. I know Indiana and Oregon are two of the most explosive offenses, and you guys held them well under all their averages. It did seem like missed tackles were a common factor in both, I guess, especially going against USC. You mentioned earlier it's one of the better run offenses in the Big Ten, the improvement they made. What's the sort of emphasis this week going in and maybe just finishing through tackles? How have you guys addressed it? How have you worked on it? Just kind of your overall assessment about the Oregon game from that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm just smiling because I'm trying to think who I read, somebody talking about that during the course of this year, and I can't remember who it was. It was a coach in college football, and they did like a 30-minute tackling session or whatever.

I don't know. We're practicing like we always do. Historically we've been pretty good. You have to factor in sometimes, too, the people you're playing and give them a little credit. Both the teams we're talking about had backs that are tough to tackle. Hemby from Indiana is a really strong runner, and those guys from Oregon are really good, too. So that factors in.

Nonetheless, if you want to be a good defensive football team, you have to tackle and tackle well. I would not disagree with what you said. Those are not our best tackling efforts overall as a game, in game condition. If we're going to play better Saturday, we have to do a little bit better job. We have to get these guys down first attempt, first guy in, and just do a little better job there.

Q. Kirk, whether it's win or loss, you guys have resisted the urge to change things too drastically, not getting too different with how you guys approach the games. Is that a message that you relate to the team to kind of keep them calm and not have them worry when there is a tough loss like there was against Oregon?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think one of the things I've appreciated in my career -- and I've worked with some really good people during my career. I feel very, very fortunate. I've been around a lot of good players. I appreciate consistency. I think it just kind of starts with wherever, and I've been various places, you have to understand what you are and who you are and what you believe in.

If you start changing that week to week or in season, it just sends a really bad message, I think. There's been times



where we've thought about it. You go 1-10, there's a lot of thoughts you have. There's certain things. I think you have to have an approach, consistency in your approach. The out of season is the time to look at things. We went through a major overhaul between '14 and '15, but there's a time and place for it, and in season is not the time typically unless there's something that's really a mess.

I don't think that's been the case. It's usually a matter of doing a little bit better and a little bit more. That's all you can try to do week to week, and that's a challenge. Like I said, this week it's easy because you go from one top opponent, and now you've got another team that could very likely end up as a top 10 team before the season is over.

Q. We asked after the game about the long snapping thing. You didn't really know exactly then what happened. Number one, did you get some more intel on how those snaps went so wild? Also, just kind of in general in special teams this year, it's been so feast or famine. Like what is your kind of overall assessment? Because you've gotten massive plays, school record field goals, but obviously traumatic plays as well.

KIRK FERENTZ: Those are things that happen in sports. Obviously weather was a factor. You have to throw the ball in the rain, and it's tougher. Snapping is ball is a little bit tougher, too. We've worked with wet balls, so it wasn't like that was a foreign thing to us.

Sometimes it just doesn't work the way you want, and things tend to go in cycles a little bit, too. Unfortunately, we had two bad snaps there. Nobody feels worse than the guy who did it, and he's working hard to become more consistent.

Your assessment of the special teams is not totally -- there have been some hit and miss moments, that type of deal, but it hasn't been just one area where we're not doing this very well week after week after week. That's where you have to really kind of knuckle down and address it. I don't think that's been the issue. It's just kind of been a little bit of a fire drill that way a little bit.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports