

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Saturday, November 22, 2025

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

**Kirk Ferentz**

Postgame Press Conference



Obviously, we didn't have much flow going on or rhythm or however you want to term it. Wasn't a lot going well for us or smoothly in that first half. Michigan State gets credit for some of that. They were pretty aggressive with their defense certainly and did a good job there.

Quite frankly, there's a couple things that happened right at the end of the first half and into the third quarter where I started getting concerned in terms of you miss opportunities, leaving stuff out there, and then are you going to be able to make that up? So that's kind of where that was at.

The bottom line is I'm proud of how our players stayed the course. They didn't flinch. They kept pushing and playing and encouraging each other. Then they continued to compete, which is the most important thing, and the coaches kept coaching.

It's a 60-minute thing. If you quit, you have no chance. Certainly our players did a great job there. Really proud of them and very happy for them because we've had some tough losses, and you deserve what you get. That's about how it goes. Sometimes it doesn't always work that way. Really happy for our guys. They can celebrate in the locker room after an effort like that.

Singling out some efforts. Got a lot of guys look like they're playing their best football, Karson and Xavier, both seniors, are playing at a faster clip than they would have been a couple months ago.

And Kaden Wetjen single handedly kept us in the game today in a lot of ways just with his returns. I don't know if I've ever been around a player like that, that electric, that much juice. Tonight he certainly impacted the game. Going back to the Purdue game, where you have a couple of key special teams plays in that game and somehow, some way you end up finding a way to win the ballgame. So I'd be remiss if I didn't single his efforts out.

You think about Drew Stevens up there with Nate Kaeding, and that's a pretty high bar. Nate set that early in this whole thing. And now you have Kaden passing Tim Dwight. That's pretty good company when you talk about place kicking or you talk about return game. Really happy for our guys, proud of them.

Iowa - 20, Michigan State - 17

KIRK FERENTZ: I talk to our players all the time there's nothing easy about winning games in college football, and today was a great example. Certainly the start of this game didn't go the way we had hoped or the way we wanted, but really the most important thing is the way you finish.

I was struggling during the game, trying to think of what this game reminded me a little bit of, and Rai Brathwaite hit it on the head. In the locker room, we talked about Purdue in '02. It's one of those games where you're like how the hell did we do that? Purdue was certainly that kind of a game.

A lot of the stuff out there didn't go the way we wanted or the way we intended, that's for sure. A lot of ups and downs through the course of the game. We talked to our guys about that as well. When all that's going on, all you can do is stay together and keep your eyes forward, see what you can do in the forefront. That part, I think our guys really did a great job of that.

I want to credit Michigan State. I'm not at all surprised, and that's something I really tried to accentuate with our team. You look at a team right there, they were 0-5 a couple weeks ago in Big Ten play. It's clear they've made a choice, their team made a choice how they're going to finish the season out. Go up to Minnesota, out gained Minnesota by 160 yards, lose in overtime. Then last week against Penn State, who we have a lot of respect for and had to play them, it's a four-point game with five minutes left.

The average fan looking at the score says, okay, it was an easy game, but you watch the tape, and you see the team is playing hard and competing. I think it speaks volumes about the job their coaches are doing and their players are doing. So we had great respect, just so everybody understands that, them coming in here. We had great respect, and we knew this was going to be tough.

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Lastly, a couple weeks ago it was John Campbell leaving, Hall of Famer, and Mike Hlas, the same way. Mike will totally be embarrassed, and that's good, because you get me all the time. I'll share a quick story with you.

First of all, I've had great respect for Mike as a journalist for 20 years now. He does quality work. Quite frankly, I don't read a lot of stuff, no disrespect there, but I read a lot of his stuff. I've always had great respect for the way he goes about his business, the way he does things.

When I took this job 27 years ago, Mike actually traveled out to Baltimore, and we sat down on a Saturday night after meetings and all that. We visited for I don't know how long. He did a really nice piece. Just had a good visit that night. Appreciate him making the effort to come out and visit.

I've been an admirer of his for a long, long time. Mike, appreciate your great work.

**Q. I know you mentioned the Purdue game in 2002. As someone who was six-years old at the time --**

KIRK FERENTZ: Thanks. I had dark hair too. (Laughter).

**Q. What I think of is the 2023 season. It seemed like you guys pulled out win after win after win.**

KIRK FERENTZ: They were all hard, yeah. Drew Tate was in the locker room, too. I don't know if you guys saw him. They were all hard in '04 too. I'll go back to that first point: Winning is hard. In those years, it was harder than ever.

**Q. Mark mentioned you've been emotional after almost every win. Can you share what is behind that for this season?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I guess, as you get older, the highs are a little higher and the lows are a little lower. I thought today we might be in one of those lows. Just happy for the guys.

You talk about doing things a certain way, but when guys go out and do it, that's tough. It's incredible. Makes you feel good. Kind of like being a dad, one of those deals, times 100.

**Q. You mentioned Karson Sharar. What did you like from him tonight? Where have you seen him grow over the last off-season?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's always been a talented guy, and developing the right focus. Unfortunately for him, kind of

like Jay Higgins, Jay got stuck behind Jack Campbell. So you're behind Jack Campbell, and it's like I'm playing really well, but there's a guy in front of me.

You think about our backers, the will backers, we've had Seth Benson and Nick Jackson, two outstanding players as well. But he kept working. He helped out on special teams and kept getting better. Even earlier in the season, I told the NFL guys, this guy is an NFL player, in my opinion. But he wasn't playing there yet because he hadn't played enough to really see things and hit it.

That's the beauty of experience. Once you get on the field and you're doing it at game speed, you just start to kind of know when to go and how to go. I think that's what we saw tonight. He's playing with some confidence now. Boy, it's fun to watch him play.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about your opponent today in Jonathan Smith. In some ways there's some parallels to him now and you at the start of your career. He's lost nine straight in the Big Ten, but they're fighting the way you guys did. You were 2-18. He's trying his best but just coming short. What kind of advice do you give to a coach like that just to know to keep chopping? In today's world they don't give you as much time.**

KIRK FERENTZ: To me, that's where people miss the boat so often, and that's the message I wanted to make sure our team especially understood.

These guys had every reason just to kind of pack it up, and believe me, there's a lot of people who don't mind doing that sometimes. But it was clear their players made a decision -- I assume it starts with the coaching staff -- they made a decision they're going to keep playing and keep playing competitively.

What they did against Minnesota and a week ago against a really talented Penn State team, it shows they're doing things right. Most importantly, the players are doing things right, which means they're getting good guidance from their coaches.

I felt very similar. To me where they're at, that's where we were in 2000, and we did get a win, a legitimate win up at Penn State and Northwestern the week after, then lost that last one.

It's part of the process. Sometimes you've got to fail to succeed. If you're doing it right, you'll learn from your failure. That's what I say across the way. Not that I'm coaching their team, but I've had great respect, and I have great respect for Jonathan as a person. His resume to me



speaks to me. He's a walk-on player who played really well.

I can tell you, I'm not an expert on this one, but I pay attention to college football. Winning at Oregon State isn't easy, as (indiscernible) said yesterday, who coached at Oregon. He knows that. It's a tough place to win, and Jonathan did a great job there.

**Q. 2002 Purdue you had a quarterback that made a really clutch throw at the very end. How did you see Mark get to the point today where he was able to make those clutch throws? Would you ever consider having someone else make those throws during the game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I remember that throw, too. During camp we have re-runs going on, wins from the past. You know, I forgot one in that game, we had like a fourth and seven or eight midfield. I think it was a little bit on the wrong side of the 50, but like we're running out of time, so we have to do something, and we went for it. Guess who took a sack? I'd forgotten about that, convenient, right, how you forget stuff. He took a sack, and we didn't pull him out. I'm glad we didn't.

My point is you go with your guys. I never even thought about it today, but it wasn't going well. I forgot how bad until I walked by it that day, and I was like it wasn't so good for Brad either. A lot easier to remember the stuff at the end.

Just like Drew missed that field goal, it wasn't a chip shot, and for him to come back in a pressure situation and nail it, that's easier said than done. It wasn't going good for Mark. It wasn't going well for anybody. But he kept playing, and all of a sudden in that fourth quarter we started looking like an offense. We started looking like a team that maybe can do some things.

Hopefully we keep it going. Give Mark a lot of credit for staying in there.

**Q. Who saw or how did your staff see that Kaden had the stuff to compete at this level?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I always tell the story when he found his way to us from Iowa Western, not that he came from too far away. He was fast. My sister could figure that out really quick. He's always been fast.

I think his whole story was his evolution. He was fearless back then, too. You didn't know what he was going to do. You didn't know if he was going to catch it. You didn't know what he was going to do once he had it.

To me, every step of the way he's made strides. Last year he played great as a return guy, didn't do a lot on offense. This year he's gotten traction there, too. He's done some good things offensively, and the play last week almost gave us a chance to win that ballgame. Two years ago that never would have happened.

We talk about Sharar, we talk about certainly Drew, just that evolution of just staying with it. He's always worked hard. I don't know if you can wear this guy out. I made the comment to the staff on Wednesday because he returns punts, and when we're punting, he'll be down there catching them. The guy never stops. I never see him get tired. I never see him without a smile on his face. He loves it.

So it's good to see him develop into a really good football player, an all-around football player. Thank God he's on our team today because we would have been in trouble for sure.

**Q. This is the second straight year where you relied on the same guy to go win you a game on senior night as time expired. What is your confidence level in Drew Stevens to win when the game is on the line? You can trust him to go win the you the game? What does it mean for you to see these seniors, your last game in Kinnick, to walk out on a high moment for you?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I think all of us had every faith that Drew would get it done. Easy for us, right, but he's the guy that has to do it. Again, I just alluded to that. I'm sure that miss was sitting back there somewhere, but you've got to push it to the side, and he did a great job of that.

The bigger picture, this team has been so enjoyable to work with. The tough part has been the losses. You win and lose, you compete and all that stuff, but the tough part has been these guys have played their asses off when we lose. So to not play our best and come away with a loss tonight would have been tough.

The seniors have done a great job going back to January of we're getting leadership from a lot of people. They've done a great job of staying the course. I think that was clearly evident tonight, too. There's no negativity on the bench. Either wherever you go, there's no negativity, and they're sticking together, and you just keep playing, find a way to get it done. That's why I'm happy for these guys, especially the seniors.

You always remember your last game in your home stadium, especially a place like Kinnick. It's such a special place to play.

**Q. With Kaden and Drew kind of moving their way up the record books, what does LeVar do that you feel like has kind of helped them get to that level?**

PLAYER 1: I mean, a lot. I think coaching is -- it's not everything. You have to have players. You can't win without players. But coaching is everything to me. That's our job is to try to do everything we can in our respective areas to try to advance guys from the day they walk in until they leave, and that's what we try to do.

That's a unique position, and I'm so glad that they created that position or at least gave us the ability to have someone solely dedicated toward that. There's a lot of scheme work certainly, but there's a lot of individual work too with the specialists. I still believe that sometimes they've got too much time on their hands, the specialists do. The whole group, you've got a lot of work to do.

But think about it, sometimes you can overthink stuff, too. I think that's one thing he guards against. He tries to get the guys just to keep the focus where it needs to be and don't start going down all these different pathways because it's easy to do.

LeVar has really taken to that role. It was not his position when he assumed that position. We created the position. He keeps getting better with every year. He's done a really nice job -- kind of like Phil Parker. Phil is a much better coordinator than he was in 2012. That's part of experience, paying attention, and really working hard at your craft, and LeVar does that. Our special teams have been good for quite a while.

**Q. Kind of following up a little bit, you mentioned that you feel a little bit like a proud dad with how the senior class have evolved. I'm curious, what are some of your favorite moments about the senior class? And what about the senior class is different or something you'll miss about them after these last two games?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It's hard to single out individual moments necessarily, but typically -- and you guys heard me say this before. Typically our leadership base kind of develops. You start out in January, and you kind of have a feeling about your team prior to spring ball. Then after spring ball you learn more, watch them work under stress a little bit and do some real hard work, football type work.

Then there's that period in the summer because summers are hard for guys training, and then you go through camp. There's a constant evolution. Usually it takes a while -- usually to me it's like in the summertime somewhere, July or August, where you get a feel for what kind of group you have.

These guys, that part has been seamless. There's a lot of the stuff that hasn't been, obviously. It's like it was pretty evident we have a bunch of guys that are focused and committed, and they're listening and they're doing. Not all guys are great at listening, and not all guys are good at hearing and doing, kind of like raising kids again. That's the deal.

These guys have been wired in. Then the beauty of that is guys that are younger -- I tell them all the time, watch guys that know how to operate. That's all you've got to do in life is watch people who are good and know how to operate. Luckily we have a bunch of those guys sitting in the front of the room. That helps a lot. It helps you build a team.

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