

# University of Iowa Football

## Media Conference

Thursday, December 18, 2025

*Iowa City, Iowa, USA*

## Coach Kirk Ferentz

## Coach LeVar Woods

### Press Conference



KIRK FERENTZ: Good Afternoon. Figured this was a good time to talk a little bit about the bowl and then provide some updates about the program. We had the banquet on Sunday, and it was a nice opportunity to honor the team on specifically the individuals that got awards. We had a large number of award winners, which is representative of this football team. We had a lot of guys that did a lot of good things, old and young, so prominently known guys and the guys on the scout team, that type of thing. So it was certainly good.

The biggest two things about the banquet, obviously, a chance to recognize a great senior class, and these guys did a great job. All 27 of them played a really important role of making this a really gratifying season for us.

I think the other component was interesting and unique to this year. We started the Tom Moore Legacy Award. Tom Moore is a guy that played here in the late '50s, never started a game here, started his coaching career here as a GA, and then has been a career NFL coach, 50 plus years in the NFL, coached in college, coached with Chuck Noll and Tony Dungy, two Hall-of-Fame coaches, four Super Bowls. But Tom has been a career assistant and a guy who's really been supportive of our program.

So we started that award in his honor, and Phil Parker was the obvious winner this year. A lot of great people to choose from and people in the future, but to me, as I said Sunday, my 36 years with this program, the assistants I've worked with, it's been absolutely fantastic.

It was Ben Hansen's idea to create the award, and a really good idea, and we'll continue to do that on an annual basis, so that was a good moment.

Vanderbilt, we'll talk about that a little bit, not in great detail, but one obvious thing, we're going to have to be at our best to play well against these guys and have a chance to compete. They have a 10-win season under their belts and play in the competitive SEC.

A lot of good players on their team, good roster, which is what it takes to win in that conference. They're well-coached, and they play with great effort, and they're very sound fundamentally. Really impressed with Clark Lea. Got to meet him last week. I've been an admirer of his from a distance here the last several years, watching him build the program brick by brick, and you started seeing some of the fruits of their labors last year, and obviously this year had a tremendous season.

They are a really good football team, they have talented players. You can't win in that conference without it. The quarterback is a tremendous football player. Very dynamic. Then they have the best tight end in the country, a guy that won the Mackey Award. Two dynamic players.

We'll transition into our next phase here. Bowl games are unique in a lot of ways, and then this month has been unique, us being sequestered here to the building. It's been a little bit strange that way. Actually it's kind of good and makes perfect sense logically, so I don't know how that happened, but we're actually here coaching, around our players, and doing what we're supposed to do, doing what we get paid to do, so that's been kind of fun.

But that's kind of where we're at right now. This week has been interesting because of the finals and all that kind of stuff, so we'll get basically the entire team together tomorrow in the afternoon, have a practice, and really up until this point, including tomorrow, it's a matter of us trying to stay in football shape and getting the work we need to get done and also maybe getting a little extra work for the younger guys that haven't played a lot.

Then we'll take the weekend off, and the next block we'll start transitioning into opponent work. We'll also work against each other but start introducing the opponent here next week.

Basically as we look at it, we have a three-day phase here. We'll travel, and then we'll go down for a normal game week in Tampa, and certainly looking forward to that. That's kind of where we're at right now.

The last thing I want to do is congratulate a couple guys. We had a lot of guys do a great job this year, but like a Kaden Wetjen, who's consensus All-American, and I'm not

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sure why he's not unanimous, I think there's a little ambiguity with the awards and all that, the various teams, how they look at returners, but if you look at return specialists, I can't imagine there's anybody better than him in the country. I'm sure there are some other great players out there, but I'm not sure I've ever been around a guy who's done a better job. It is great to see his efforts being recognized.

Then Logan Jones being a unanimous consensus All-American and also winning the Rimington Trophy. Very special for him.

I'll state that the banquet will be in Lincoln, so it's a home game for Logan. It's something he really is deserving of. What a tremendous young man and football player.

Happy for those two guys in particular.

I'll throw it out for questions and update you a little bit as we go.

**Q. With NIL, with the transfer portal, with all of these other outside factors that didn't exist five or six years ago, at some point, did college football lose kind of the plot and the point of it as far as play the game and win, and on top of that you have guys that could easily opt out of this bowl game but they've all stood by you and want to play one last game. How do you teach that culture? Does it go back to recruiting? Does it go back to coaching? Just curious about your input.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, one quick observation, and again, I'm not an expert at Vanderbilt, but watching from afar, the little bit I know about them, I think they're probably in the same boat. This bowl game actually kind of pits two teams -- it's a little bit like looking in the mirror in some ways. The quarterbacks are both key players on both teams, and certainly they're different dimensionally, but really key player.

But to your point, I think from my research so far at least, their roster have been intact. They've done a good job. They've supplemented a little bit, and quarterback is an example, but they've pretty much grown that program internally.

I think we're trying to do the same thing, and then all that being said, to your point, it's gratifying to know our guys want to play the bowl game and want to enjoy this last opportunity to be together.

It's unique in that regard where I think we've got two teams that are kind of looking at each other, look a little bit like each other in some ways. But yeah, the whole state of

college football really is a really interesting study.

I told people eight, ten months ago, I feel really good about this year and this team. What happens in January, who knows. I still stand by that.

I feel like we're positioned right now and in good position as we move forward. But who knows what's going to happen in the new year, and it's just unfortunate we're in a situation where the guardrails -- they're getting better but they're not there yet. We're still kind of working on that, and I hope we can push it over the top.

But it seems like we all have a hard time agreeing on how to play, what the rules are we want to play by.

**Q. Curious, Cam Buffington, this bowl prep period, what have you seen out of him and his development?**

KIRK FERENTZ: He's done a really nice job. Got a lot of young guys that really it's been good for us to see him and the exposure. Right now he's going full speed. He not always going the right way full speed, but he's going full speed, and he's really done a good job.

Got a good group of young guys. Certainly got some guys graduating here, three seniors in the middle of the linebacker group, but good group of young guys, and Cam has done a really good job.

These are just really beneficial practices for him where he's getting repetition that maybe he doesn't get in the fall and being coached in our defense and getting a lot of good work and good meeting time, so it's been good for him.

He has a great attitude and all that type of thing. So far, so good.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Diego Pavia, and the dual-threat nature. When you look at him, you maybe don't think that, but then you see his production and it's off the charts and the way his team rallies around him seems to really show through in all of their games. It's easy for me to ask what should you do on defense, but is there a specific aspect that he does that you have to say, we have to be accountable for X or this could just blow our whole opportunity to win?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think you touched on, first of all, I think maybe the most important thing he does, and this is what good quarterbacks do is just how they impact their team, regardless of how tall they are, how tall they aren't, whatever their style of play may be. But does his team believe in him, do they move when that player is in the game.



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To me, that's what the really good quarterbacks do. He certainly has done that. He's had a huge impact on their team and made them more explosive.

In terms of what we have to do, boy, that's a great question, but I guess the one stat I would share with you, without getting too specific, he's got a good yards per carry on him, but where it really gets scary is if you chart the yards per carry on scrambles, it's times two basically.

I think that's pretty telling. Somehow, some way, you've got to try to keep him contained. Easier said than done because what you don't want to do is just start running in place up there, too. You still have to try to pressure the quarterback and disrupt him.

But you don't want to disrupt him too much because when he starts taking off, that's when bad things tend to happen. It's easier said than done. I'm was driving to work listening to Bill Polian talk about Lamar Jackson from Baltimore and just the dangers when you play a guy like that. When he starts to run you've got real problems, but he can throw it, too, off the run, and that's the big challenge for us. It's easier said than done.

**Q. Koen Entringer, he walked, so the one guy that maybe has a stay-or-go decision, do you know what he's going to do?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, as far as I know, he's planning on coming back, and he's working hard. He's been out there every day working really hard and really well. I don't think he has any plans of going anywhere, but I'll verify that and give that to you. I'll give you all updates when we get down there.

**Q. I know you mentioned kind of the bowl preparation and what goes into that, having like a month off. How much has that mindset for you changed over the years with your coaching philosophy, getting the guys in, whether to go practice full time or take some time off?**

KIRK FERENTZ: One good thing about doing something for a while, at least you have a lot of data and information to go off of. Probably too much, quite frankly. But the biggest change since it began is we have actually been here, the coaches have been here, so going back 20 years ago or even a couple years ago, you're trying to recruit during the week and get back here and squeeze practices in.

So we've been pretty systematic with it and kind of handled it a little bit like an extended bye week, if you will, this portion of it where early in the phase the guys that have

played this fall, we didn't put them in pads at all. They've been in a couple times now. But we were able to keep them just in non-contact work and tried to keep them football movement-wise where they're not falling too far behind there but not have the contact and give them a chance to really get back physically to where they were, and at the same time work on the guys that weren't playing all those snaps and giving them a chance to move forward as football players.

Hopefully a couple guys will help make contributions in this game. It's kind of a balancing act, if you will. Again, it's almost like an elongated bye week for us. That's something, too, up until the last two years, I really haven't felt too comfortable about our bye week approach, either. I'm a senior citizen now, still struggling with some of this stuff on trying to figure out what the best formula is.

But I feel good about what it is. The biggest thing is I remember probably 20 years ago when Bob Knight used to be on ESPN as a commentator a lot, and it was March Madness, I think we were on spring break probably, and one thing that's always stuck with me, he was talking about getting a team ready for tournaments and et cetera, and he just made the comment "less is more," and I think that's kind of resonated with me. I think the longer you get in this, the more you realize it's probably important.

I was actually, coincidentally, thinking about this this morning, about Andy Reid, because he always wins after a bye week, and they don't do anything their bye weeks. Everybody is out of there as far as I understand. The players are, the coaches barely go in. But also Mahomes was his quarterback. But the rest of it, he did the same thing and had a really good record.

You have to try to use your best judgment. There's no perfect formula. As much as anything, it's just how the players handle it. I think that's how their response is is what's key, and the guys have been great. They've really been practicing well, so I'm happy about that and relatively healthy, so that's good news, as well.

The last thing, I want to take a minute here and just give you a program update. LeVar Woods, who's going to come up here in a second, has decided to take another position. He's going to take a position at another program, so he's going to coach throughout the bowl game, throughout this bowl game and then he'll be heading to Michigan State.

I know it was a tough decision for him, and it was a really good opportunity for him to consider. We've had several coaches have that opportunity, as well. Just first and foremost, just want to congratulate him on that and just



share a couple words about LeVar.

He was on the team when I got here in December of '98 and was a veteran player, one of the good veteran players that we had, and was a really big part of helping try to build this thing when we got started. Obviously a good player but more importantly a real leader and a guy who had helped set tempo and was really responsive to the way we were doing things.

Appreciate that, and that goes back 27 years ago. His most memorable play that year was that 87-yard field goal block that Matt Bowen got, south end zone there and took it back for a touchdown in our first and only win that season, and I don't think we win that game without that play, and he did that despite having humongous shoulder pads on (laughter).

In some ways, that might be a little foreshadowing to the rest of his career as a special teams player, and obviously he's done a great job there.

Went on and had a tremendous pro career, long pro career, and then he came back here 18 years ago and joined our staff really without an assignment, but he was interested in coaching and getting into it, and to me it was great to bring him back and just let him experience things a little bit and figure out if that is what he wanted to do, and he certainly decided he was interested in that and did a great job on several fronts.

If you go back to his start, he's a proud lowan, played at West Lyon, and when they won the state championship out there a couple weeks ago, he was out there cheerleading. I think he might have won a bet or two internally with a couple players, but did a great job there, came here, did a great job on the career, and then when he joined us, he coached several positions, linebackers, tight ends, and then when the NCAA allowed us to create another position, that's when we created a full-time special teams coordinator job and thought LeVar would be perfect at it, and he's been better than that.

He's done a great job, coached a lot of great players in his role at all positions but particularly the special teams. You guys know better than I how well we've done statistically on special teams. I think you also understand just how important that's been for 27 years in our thinking as a program, just the value of special teams.

I'm really appreciative of the way he's taken that role, what he did with it in growing it, and just did an absolutely fantastic job.

On top of that, he and Meghann have raised three beautiful

kids. Sydney worked here for a while in the summers and that type of thing. She's working down at the University of Texas. She's a student down there. Mason is with us now, and then Whitney, their youngest, I believe just turned 13 or is turning 13, but she's like my granddaughter, 13 going on 26. So really great family.

I want to compliment him. Obviously we're all sad to see him leave, but I'm appreciative he's going to coach through the bowl game. I know he'll do a great job moving forward here.

Thank you.

LEVAR WOODS: This is definitely different. I want to thank you guys for being here, and thank you for that. I'd be remiss if I did not mention Mike Hlas, who I've known Mike since I came back. He's done a really good job. I know he's no longer covering us here at the University of Iowa, but I want to mention him, and thank you for being here.

First and foremost, there are definitely places that shape you, and there are places that make you. For me, Iowa is both. I grew up here. I learned what it means to work, to be accountable, to show up when it's hard, to put the team ahead of myself, and I had the privilege of wearing the black and gold, living out a dream that so many kids in this state carry with them from the first time they toss a ball in the backyard.

The University of Iowa gave me more than football. It gave me my life. I met my wife here in Iowa City, in fact, met her at the Old Capital Mall on campus. We were both very young. We left here so I could pursue a career in the National Football League.

We started our family elsewhere in a different state with our first two kids born in Arizona. We chose to return to Iowa to raise our family here in Iowa City. No plan to coach, no plan to do anything other than raise our kids here in this community.

Together we built a home, expanded our family here, had our third daughter that Coach mentioned here in this community. Our kids have grown up with the same values of this community that they poured into me. Same thing with the university, with neighbors who care, teachers, faculty, people that invest in you, coaches who push you, community that rallies around its own, and that's what we have here. That's what makes it incredibly difficult to have decisions and make decisions like this.

Iowa City hasn't been a stop on our journey, it's really been the center of it. As long as I can think about being an

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adult, certainly don't get to these points by yourself. I'd be remiss if I did not bring up some people, some unbelievable mentors that I've had and saw more in me than I saw in myself, starting with my mom, Barb, who taught me work ethic while raising two kids by herself as a single mom. Followed by my high school coaches, specifically Jay Rozeboom and Eric TeGrootenhuys. They taught me the game of football and helped guide me through difficult high school years.

Coach Hayden Fry and his staff believed in me, recruited me from rural northwest Iowa and gave me a chance, like every small town kid in Iowa wants to play for the Hawkeyes.

Lastly, talking about mentors, Norm Parker and Coach Ferentz, who when Coach arrived in Iowa City showed a steady example of leadership, consistency, humility, showed real care for people. He didn't have to do that. He inherited a group of people; he didn't have to do it that way, but he did.

He not only accelerated my game as a player but also helped guide me and shape my career as a coach. Norm Parker told us that anybody that played linebacker at that time can attest to this, he said, if you ever want to know what it's like to be a man, watch Kirk Ferentz, and I've been watching Coach Ferentz ever since, and I've been taking notes and I've been listening.

I'll always be grateful for that trust that Coach showed in me for the chance to grow here under Coach's leadership and the various roles that he gave me. I've thought long and hard about this, prayed upon it, conversations with family, made a decision to accept a new professional opportunity at Michigan State.

This is not easy at all, if you can't tell. You don't walk away lightly from a program like this, a place like this, a locker room like this, players like this, coaches, a state that feels like family. It's not easy to do.

But there comes a time when I feel called to stretch and grow and try to pursue a different opportunity, expand professionally, take on a new challenge, and I feel like that time is now.

To Hawkeye Nation, to the players I've coached, to the people I've been fortunate to work alongside, I want to thank everybody. Thank you for your continued support, the excitement you guys have in special teams. It's very rare; I'm aware of that. Very rarely do you go into a stadium where they cheer for the punter on the first play of the game, so I'm definitely attuned to that.

But thanks for all that you guys have given me, my wife, my kids, my family and all the time, especially to Coach Ferentz. I'll always be a Hawkeye, and go Hawks.

**Q. What position are you taking at Michigan State, and what's your relationship with Pat Fitzgerald now that he has taken over, and how long have you known him and been around him?**

LEVAR WOODS: So the position is the assistant head coach and special teams coordinator. I haven't known Pat a long time. But I've been watching him. We've been playing against him, competing against him. He was a player a couple years older than me when I was in college, and a very competitive player.

All the teams, every time we've lined up against Northwestern when he was coaching there, very competitive teams, probably with lesser athletes, lesser talent. He's definitely a competitor that I've seen, a leader within the conference, and to me he shares a lot of the same values that Coach Ferentz has instilled upon this program.

Sort of those things have come along as opportunities, and I feel like it's an opportunity to go somewhere where you can build from the ground and see it from a different way, a different perspective, yet still have that same thought of trying to develop men, trying to develop the person, not just, hey, here's a good football player, let's pay him this and get him out of here.

To me, that's what I'm excited about.

**Q. Obviously we could tell that this place, Iowa City, holds a special place in your heart. As you depart to Michigan State, what do you think are some of those core values that you learned here that you'll take over there?**

LEVAR WOODS: Hard work, discipline, dedication, a real sense of community that's here. I think anytime anyone that comes here feels that, and whether it's a recruit that comes here, whether it's anyone that leaves this university, they feel a sense to come back to the community that's here. Those are things that I will remember here and take with me.

**Q. You've really known nothing but long-term coaches in your high school and college career, between Kirk, Hayden Fry and Jay Rozeboom has been around for whatever, 35 years or so at West Lyon. What's maybe the biggest thing you've taken from some of those guys that you want to apply to your coaching career as you take that next step?**

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, that's a great point. My experience with the longevity of coaches, the guys that have been successful are they care about the people that they're coaching and it's very evident you see that with Coach Ferentz every time -- if you guys ever have a chance to talk with Jay Rozeboom and you ever sit down with him, he definitely cares about his players, and he still has relationships with them.

I did consult him about this at one point. I think he still is waiting to figure out what I've decided because I have not told him. He's finding out now, I guess.

Then Hayden Fry was here as long as he was. I think those are the common threads amongst all three of them. In my experience in high school and the University of Iowa as a player and as a coach, there's longevity.

My experience as a player in the National Football League was everything but that. In seven years I had seven different head coaches, seven different defensive coordinators. I grew accustomed to some of that during that time. It also makes you appreciate places like this and people like Coach Ferentz, Coach Fry, Coach Rozeboom, so that's definitely what this place has.

To me, the challenge going forward is walking into a situation where maybe they hadn't had some of that longevity. Maybe they haven't had some of that stability and try to see if we can build and see what happens with that.

I do know -- I played in Detroit for a couple years. I do know at the time I was part of probably not the most glamorous years of the Detroit Lions, but I do feel comfortable with the state of Michigan and their fans. They're rabid fans, and I said this about two -- I said it, whatever, 20 years ago and two years ago when the Lions were in the thick of it for the Super Bowl hunt; when Detroit becomes a real team and the fans get going, they're going to love this place.

That's what you see right now with what Dan Campbell has been doing with the Lions, and those fans are rabid and ready to win.

**Q. I don't want to get too far ahead here, but is it fair to say that you have ambitions of being a head coach someday? Secondly, what was your initial reaction when I'm assuming Pat reached out or somebody reached out about the position?**

LEVAR WOODS: Yeah, those are ambitions I have. I think anyone that gets into coaching definitely has those

ambitions at some point. I feel like for me personally at this time of my life, I'm going to be 48 years old, which isn't all that old, but it's old for me and kind of where I'm trying to go trajectory-wise, and I feel like now is a good time for that.

I also feel like the opportunity to try to get hands dirty on the front end of something that Michigan State has got going on, that that's a great opportunity to learn those things.

Pat and I really spent the most time together with our kids. My son is here, his son is here on the team, and as parents that's probably the most time that's spent.

But again, a lot of respect for him, watching him as a competitor, competing against him, and seeing his teams.

**Q. You mentioned wanting to stretch your wings. What was kind of nagging you that you wanted to do elsewhere that was maybe inside you that you prayed about, and do you expect your son to stay here or come with you?**

LEVAR WOODS: Let me answer those in reverse. Mason, this is his place. He chose this place on his own accord. Obviously he grew up around here, grew up watching. He's seen it. He's met Coach Ferentz running up and down these halls when he was in diapers. I could embarrass him quite a lot if I wanted to but I will refrain from that with some private stories.

But he chose this place, and he and I have had conversations when other situations have come up, but he feels great about it. This is a great place. I trust that my son is here, so I wouldn't put my son in a position where I felt like it was a bad spot or bad people or anything like that. That's not the case here.

This is his place, and this was my place for a long time. I feel like I just need to see something different. If you think about it, I met with one of the players and they started doing the math, started figuring out, Coach, you've been like 42 years of your life lived in Iowa. It's crazy when you think about it. So at some point -- I challenge the players all the time to grow or get uncomfortable, put yourself in positions. I sent my daughter down to Texas. She didn't know anyone down there. Go figure it out.

I feel like I'm kind of at that point in my life. That's kind of where all that decision came from, and trying to take a leap and see what happens.

**Q. You've talked about some of the people here that have given to you. What do you hope that you have**



**left here and you have given the people at Iowa?**

LEVAR WOODS: You know, if you're talking about players, I hope they know I cared about them. I see in them more than they see in themselves. I hope they know that, that they always had an opportunity, and I tried to push them to be the best that they can.

The coaches I worked with, I hope that they saw someone that was committed to the cause each and every day and tried to put my best foot forward each and every day. That's all you can really ask for.

Bottom line, if I were to pick one thing, it would be that I cared and gave a crap about them. What people have done for me, they've poured into me, and I've tried to pour into them.

When I first became a coach, when I first started thinking about it, I wanted to be like my high school coach, a guy that basically saved my life, for lack of a better team. I wanted to be a teacher -- I went to school to be an elementary ed teacher and eventually was going to be a high school coach, and somehow I just ended up teaching bigger kids here in college football.

But that's what I wanted to be in because he poured into me. I'm trying to pour into them.

KIRK FERENTZ: Just really appreciate the job LeVar has done. I don't think I need to say much more about that. It's been fantastic, and really appreciate him staying with the team and coaching throughout this bowl game.

I know he'll do a great job. Meantime, great job the next couple weeks. We'll look forward to that. I'll throw it out if anybody has a question.

**Q. Out of curiosity, what was the conversation like with Woods when you guys decided that he will be able to still continue to coach the ReliaQuest Bowl on New Years Eve?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Obviously we've had conversations the last couple weeks back and forth a little bit, but I don't know what's normal anymore, quite frankly. I had this thought this morning. Jimmy Johnson actually was coaching at Pitt. Jackie Sherrill was defensive coordinator late '70s, and I think they were at the Tangerine Bowl and he accepted the Oklahoma State job. He, Dave Wannstedt, Tony Weiss were all on the staff at Pitt and those guys all headed out there, but they coached throughout the bowl game, so it's been done before.

It all depends on the people involved, and certainly I think

as you know, LeVar, a big part of his life has been here. He's done a fantastic job. I think we mutually agreed this was what's best for the team. It's certainly what's best for everybody involved. I know he'll do a great job here the next couple weeks.

**Q. Obviously very, very early, very fresh, but what are your thought processes on how you replace him? Obviously you've understood how valuable this position is. Probably not a light decision.**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's not a light decision. The trick will be to find the next LeVar Woods. He's done a fantastic job. He didn't have the profile necessarily maybe at that point to predict what he was going to do, but he's done all the work. It's like a good player; players do the work. LeVar has done a great job immersing himself and learning every aspect and then growing with each and every turn. So I guess I'm describing what we're looking for, a guy who's a good coach, who's eager to take a challenge on, and immerse themselves in that world.

Special teams is a unique niche, if you will. I'm sure we'll have good candidates. It's not pressing right now in my mind. What is pressing is the next two weeks getting ready for the game, and then after that we'll have eight plus weeks or eight plus months actually to get it right. I don't plan on waiting until August to fill it, but we'll figure that out when we get in the new year.

**Q. Not to be redundant and ask the same thing about LeVar, I'd rather ask about quarterbacks right now. You've had a couple weeks to look at the quarterbacks, probably not so much Mark but the others. How do you feel about the position now going into the bowl game post-Mark Gronowski, and will you be active in the portal seeing if there's an opportunity to improve the team at that position or do you feel good about where you are right now?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Never say never to any possibilities, but that's not a primary thought right now. I would just interject, too, I think this has been important for Mark, too, because of some of the time he missed with the injury, so he's gaining ground every day, so I think that's a good thing. His attitude has been consistent all the way through it.

Yeah, we've been able to work all the guys actually. I think Jeremy and I think Hank are both making strides and improving. We're seeing progress out there, so that's encouraging actually. So far, so good.

As we sit here right now, the goal is not to have to look outside. We'll keep an eye on things, but that's not our



intention now as we stand here.

**Q. DJ Vonnahme has been your leading receiver in the regular season in yards. What did he do because he came as a PWO. What did he do basically within one season in the program to earn that scholarship?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, so we were pretty sure he wasn't a quarterback. I thought he was a pretty good athlete. He's a tremendous guy, and he'd come through camp and all that type of thing. So we got a look at him.

But what we didn't know is how he would transition into that spot. I've said it before, I think probably the most impressive thing to me has been just his ability to block, and he's got a knock for -- kind of gets a deal for doing it, for a guy who has never done it that surprised me a little bit, quite frankly, in a good way. It was a really positive thing.

We knew he was a good athlete, maybe knew he had the potential to be a good receiver, not only catching the ball but running with it, those kinds of things, but I think the run blocking has probably been more surprising to me. Doing it the way he does, he has a great attitude, he's very eager to do it, very willing to do it, seems to like it, and for a young guy only in his second year on campus to play the way he did, probably a little bit more physical than you would expect those types of things.

Really excited about him, and we all kind of saw that coming in spring ball. That's one of the -- that 15-day window, just saw him progressing each and every day. So I'm not going to say we're not surprised, but we kind of saw that one developing maybe, and it's really good to see what he's doing, and it's also exciting to know he's going to keep getting better because he's got a great attitude.

**Q. With Kaden Wetjen obviously having another solid year and with the new NFL kickoff rule, for a guy like him, do you think his NFL stock has kind of risen and maybe you've had conversations with some of those scouts over the course of the season? Has his stock risen with that kickoff rule and how dynamic he is in that area of the game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they certainly have noticed him. I think I told all those guys back in August, September, their first round is coming through. Typically with our guys you know more in November. The story kind of unfolds a little bit. We have several guys that fit that category that I think have really moved up, and Kaden is one of them.

We were all excited about him, and I've said that before, but the way he's improved is just, I think, unbelievable.

Again, it's a credit to him. He's the guy doing the hard work. He's got such a great attitude. I don't know how many miles he runs every day in practice. It's scary. But the guy never gets tired. He's always got a smile on his face. Just loves football, loves everything about it, being around his teammates and all that, but what he does on the field competitively is really impressive.

I think I mentioned before when I was in Baltimore, whatever year that was, we drafted a guy Jermaine Lewis who was primarily a returner, also a receiver but primarily a returner, wasn't the biggest guy in the world and I'd have to look to up to see how they compare, but with all due respect to him, he was not as electric as Kaden is.

I can just talk about my experience. I don't know if I've ever been around a return guy that has that kind of -- just is so dynamic, and he's fearless. He's got great vision, can do things that most humans can't do.

On top of that, he's great to be around. He's fun to be around. His teammates love him. It's such a win-win situation, but I think the neater thing is just his progression because a couple years ago he was a fast guy who ran around and didn't always run the right way and all that stuff, so really he's become such a good football player and a really big part of our success.

So just happy for him. I think he's got a great future. I think the NFL people are probably figuring that out themselves. They don't need our help.

Okay, see you guys in Tampa, and I want to wish everybody a Merry Christmas. Thank you.

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