

# Rutgers University Football Media Conference

Monday, January 16, 2023

Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

## Kirk Ciarrocca

### Press Conference



KIRK CIARROCCA: How's everybody doing?

**Q. I guess the first one is an obvious one. What's it like to be back and working with Coach Schiano again?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: It's super exciting for me, it really is. Coach and I have a special relationship. It's an interesting relationship. Because if you ever listen to me talk to somebody else and they ask me about my career, I always credit him with really shaping and developing me as a coach and my philosophies.

And then from there, after we left each other, we became friends. If I have to make an important decision in my career, I always called him. He was one of the people I would call and share with. We developed a tremendous friendship, and it's out of respect for him that we have that type of friendship.

I know what a great football coach he is, and I'm excited to be back with him.

**Q. In terms of the offense, a lot of fans and people are curious with what you are going to run. Can you describe what offense?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: Sure, I want it to be balanced in the perfect world, right.

So if you want to look at some type of film or something and see what it looks like at some point, at 2019 at Minnesota, the third year I was there, we had it pretty much in place the way we wanted it to be, very balanced. We had two thousand-yard receivers and a thousand-yard rusher.

If you look at the last two years at Western Michigan, '15 and '16, once we had everything in place, the development of the players and had everything going the way we wanted it to go, I think we had two thousand-yard receivers there and a thousand-yard rusher. We would really like to have balance and by balance, I mean -- I don't mean 40

runs, 40 passes at the end of the game. We have the ability to win the game if we need to rush for 550 yards or win the game if we need to throw for 350 yards.

So that's really the end game. That's the vision that I have. When we've been Top-10, Top 20 in the country that's the type of offense we've had.

But also, though, Coach mentioned it, I want to win, okay, and so we're going to look at our personnel that we have here and decide what gives us the best chance to be able to do that immediately here.

Last year if you looked at our offense at Minnesota, our best chance was to be able to be physical and establish the running game and run the ball. We had a great tailback. He was our best player. I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I know I've got to get the ball in the right hands of the right people to allow them a chance to influence the game. At the end of the day, that's probably the most important job that I do.

So we'll look at things. I'm super -- I can't wait to meet the players tonight. Super excited to get started working with them and learning about them, and finding out what do we do best, what are our strengths, right. Because I've got to accentuate our strengths and I've got to limit our weaknesses. That's really what I've got to do, so I'm excited about it.

**Q. What are your impressions of Gavin, and what's your approach to developing a young quarterback, where he is in his career?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: I'm excited about getting a chance to work with all the quarterbacks here at Rutgers. Gavin I know has a lot of talent and a lot of ability, so that excites me. But I'm just looking forward to getting work with him, right, and that's what I need to do. I need to get out there.

Spring ball will be really, really important for me to get a chance to see these guys. It's one thing for me to put the film on but we're six months later. This is a new season with these guys and just kind of see where they are at: What are his strengths; what are his weaknesses; how does that fit into the system; what do we need to



emphasize, that type of thing; how does he learn; how does he learn from his mistakes.

These are all questions that are going to be answered once we get out on the field and get a chance to start to work with him. But I think in developing a quarterback, I really think there's two major areas that we work on that I believe in, is from the waist down, his feet, from his platform to pocket movement, those type of things. So we work really hard understanding the rhythm of the pass play, what it should be, tying that to your drop, those type of things.

And then we work really hard from the neck up, developing him up here. He need to be an extension of me out there on the field, and so maybe the most important thing I do is teach him how to think deductively, and I want him to think like I would think. But he doesn't always have to come up with the same conclusion that I would come up with, right.

But he needs to have the same process, so I know what he's thinking; how he's thinking about things when he looks at the defense out there, so I know what play to get him into from that standpoint.

But I'm just excited to get to work with all the kids. I think that kids are excited about it. I know I'm excited about it and looking forward to teaching him and doing this.

You know, like, to me, this is what I do, right. I go to programs where the offenses might not have had as much success as we'd want, and then we build an offense there, and if you look at my track record, we've been able to do that.

So I'm excited about the challenge here but I'm also excited not only about the challenge, but I'm excited about the program and where it's at right now and the infrastructure that's set up; the three recruiting classes that they have had already, the culture that they have here. I think I'm going to be at the right place at the right time right now.

**Q. You mentioned a couple traits that stand out to you about quarterbacks. What do you value the most when it comes to evaluating a quarterback and recruiting a quarterback?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: Well, I think there's this thing in football, right. If you throw a forward pass, if you throw the ball forward, the guy has to catch it in order to advance the football. So I value accuracy among everything, right.

I would love for arm strength, the better the arm, the more things you can do, the better you can stretch the field. But

the ball still -- it doesn't matter if you can throw it 70 yards down the field; if the guy is not going to catch it, it doesn't matter. So accuracy is No. 1.

No. 2 is -- and this is in no particular order. No. 2 would be functional intelligence, right. He has to be able to think deductively and learn from his mistakes.

And then the third thing is leadership. They are the three things that I look the most at. And when I go out and evaluate a quarterback, they are the things I'm thinking about, where is he in these areas.

And again, right, you would love to have the guy that can throw it 70 yards, right. So the stronger the arm, the better. But we cannot sacrifice accuracy. We cannot sacrifice leadership.

The quarterback position, you know, we are in the largest media market in the United States right here, right. He's the face of the program. So he's got to have leadership, also, and be able to lead the team. So they are the three things I look for, though.

**Q. As part of your success offensively, it looks like you have valued the tight end position. Can you talk about your philosophy and especially in the northeast, having that part of the game involved?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: Yeah, I've been -- again, if you look at the last seven or eight years where I've coached at, you know, some years, there was a lot of catches for the tight ends. Other years, there wasn't very many, right.

Coincidentally, the years the tight ends had a lot of catches, he was a pretty good receiver with it. So I think it just goes with accentuating the strengths of what you have there to work with.

I love a tight end that can run and catch because it's easy to create those mismatches for him to get him on linebackers to get him on their worst cover guy when you detach him. That's easy and it's definitely a bonus when we have that, and when we do, we try to take advantage of that. But I think he's a big key piece of the puzzle.

**Q. You talked when you started off about your relationship with Greg and how you turned to him throughout. Can you talk about the development of that relationship since you were here a decade and a half ago, and how that formed and impacted the decision now to come back?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: I think when I was here, I was obviously a lot younger. But I quickly realized that this guy



was special, you know, a special man and what a great football coach he was and what a better teacher he was, is probably a better description of him.

You know, he's a great teacher. You know, how much he worked at developing the coaches that he had in his system. So that was like the first thing that caught my eye.

And I always enjoyed conversations with Coach when I was here before. It didn't have to be good football. It could be about anything. You know, I always enjoyed when we went recruiting together and we would grab dinner before we would go on the home visit so we could talk and have those conversations.

I think after I left here, you know, we stayed friends, right. That might be hard for some people to believe but we were friends with it. I understood the decision. Didn't mean I had to agree with it, but I understood it. And we were friends, and he continued to mentor me.

We continued to talk all the time, whether it was about football or just life. It's one of those deals where he might call me or I might call him and it was going to be, we just had one little question to ask each other and then the next thing I know, we would be on the phone for 45 minutes talking about other things with it.

So you know, it went from that, and a mentor to me with that and a friendship. I think probably the last three or four years, you know, we just spent a lot of time on the phone just talking about football, a lot, philosophies and those type of things. You know, he's asking me questions about developing an offense and I would share with him my thoughts and those type of things.

But at the end of the day, I have tremendous respect for him as a man, right, and I'm just looking forward to helping him do this here.

**Q. Just want to know what you learned from your first go-around here at Rutgers.**

KIRK CIARROCCA: That's a great question, right. And I share this with people all the time, especially young coaches.

I've gained a great deal of experience from that experience here, and I think this: When you don't have success at something, right; and again I share this with young coaches all the time, when we don't have success in something, it doesn't go the way you want it to go, right. We have a choice that we can make, right. We can focus on all these things that we didn't have any control over that influenced the outcome, right, or we can sit here and look

at these couple of things over here that had we done it differently, we might have given ourselves a better chance.

We still might have the same outcome but we might have given ourselves a better chance, and after I left here and I had a chance to reflect on things, there's a couple of things that I learned that I felt like could help me in the future, and they have. I've been able to reach back and lean on those things.

When I first got to Western Michigan, we were not very good, not very good at all. I don't know, we might have been the worst offense in the country the first year I was there. But I was a little better equipped to handle that situation than I was when I was here before. I knew exactly what I wanted. I knew exactly how I wanted it to look, and I knew this: That nothing was going to get me off that road that I was on because I knew that this gave me the best chance.

I didn't have anything guaranteed that we were going to end up being a great offense. But I knew that this is how I wanted it to go, and I was not coming off that road. And it doesn't matter how bumpy it was at that point in time. It was tough, right.

By the second year, we were above average and at that point, I knew that we were headed in the right direction. By the third and fourth year there, we were as good of an offense as anybody in the country, right.

Then I went to Minnesota the first time and again, we were arguably, certainly the worst offense in the Big Ten the first year I was there. Arguably one of the worst offenses in the country that first year I was there, and again, I trusted myself, and there's a lot of people with ideas of how to do it, right.

But I knew exactly that I was on the right road, at least I was going to trust myself that I was no matter what, and that it would turn and that we would get it going in the right direction.

And again, we were able to do that. I don't think without the experience that I had at Rutgers, I'm not sure I would have been equipped to handle that the way that we did and been able to turn it around as quickly as we did at those two places.

So I think that's probably the biggest difference in me now is I know exactly -- I feel like I know exactly what it takes to get an offense to operate at a high level and it doesn't happen overnight. You know, you guys might not be able to see it. It might be just in small little increments.

I tell the guys -- I tell the coaches all the time when we were doing this is, guys, just keep fighting for the inches because at the end of the day, those inches are going to add up and at some point we are going to be good. But without getting those inches, keep grinding toward it, we're never going to get there.

So I'm just sure of where I want to go and how I want to do it now.

**Q. Can you just take us through the past month, you signed that extension at Minnesota, seemed like you were intent on staying there, and you're obviously here now. What changed and why did you end up here at Rutgers?**

KIRK CIARROCCA: Well, I think that the coaching environment has changed a lot in the last 15 years, and how things are done and how guys are moving around and that type of thing.

I can say this: We are in a lot of jobs out there that would have gotten me to leave the University of Minnesota. I know that because Coach wasn't the only guy who called me in the off-season.

But I really wasn't looking to leave the University of Minnesota. What came upon me in talking with Coach was what I considered a great opportunity, a chance to get back on the East Coast; that's where I'm from. This is where my family is; a chance to work with a guy that I respect the heck out of. I respect the heck out of Coach Fleck, too, but this is an opportunity to work with a guy that I respect the heck out of.

I thought that this was the right time at Rutgers. I remember talking to Coach after the game and Joe after the game and saying: Hey, you guys are headed in the right direction. You can see a huge difference between the team we played in 2019 and the team we just played in Minneapolis. I can see the difference. I want to make sure you guys know that; stay the course.

So I don't know if there's anybody else in the country that could have gotten me to leave Minnesota besides Coach to be honest with you, and the opportunity to do this here at Rutgers and do at that time home -- I think what was pretty cool for me was yesterday, we went to the basketball game.

If you asked me about plays in the basketball game, I probably can't tell you very much about the actual plays because I was just sitting there, and I was watching the student section and how into the game they were, and the crowd getting on their feet at different times in the game

when they needed a defensive stand.

I was sitting there: Yes, this is one of the reasons why I came back here is we put that type of product out there in the stadium, that's what the student section is going to be like out there. That's what it's going to be like and that's what the State of New Jersey is going to be like about Rutgers Football.

Thank you, guys, appreciate it. Great to meet you guys, and see you all again, some faces I recognize.

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