

ReliaQuest Bowl: Vanderbilt vs Iowa

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

Tampa, Florida, USA

Raymond James Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Mark Gronowski

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa 34, Vanderbilt 27

Q. Mark, as you are entering an uncertain point, a legendary coach talked about you as a representative of the thing that keeps him going in his craft. What's that mean for you?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, it means a lot. I can't thank Coach enough for just giving me an opportunity to play here at the University of Iowa. It's been a fantastic year. Obviously it hasn't gone exactly how we wanted it to. There's been a lot of ups and downs, emotional games, but to have a coach like that who builds a culture that we have, you know, it's been a lot of fun, and made a lot of great relationships along the way.

Q. How have you seen yourself grow this season?

MARK GRONOWSKI: One of the main reasons I came here was because of Coach Lester. He brings a lot to the game. He's a former quarterback, has been in the NFL coaching-wise, and has coached at a lot of different places. He's taught me a lot about just continuing to be aggressive in the game, continuing to be aggressive on pass plays.

There's just been a lot of growth just with growing with the receivers, growing with the guys on the team. Not just in the game of football, but just trying to build relationships, trying to build an even stronger culture, trying to build a stronger standard for the offense and knowing that we didn't obviously get to every goal that we had every single week, but we're continuing to strive for that.

I feel like this year we continued to build another standard that can lead on to the next year.

Q. I talked to your parents after the game. I understand today is your dad's birthday. You brought him the game ball. Just how special was this after a lengthy college career to be able to do that in the front



row of the field?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, it was really cool. Back in, what is that, first grade, kindergarten when I start playing football, he was my first coach. It's been a long career.

I played catch with him for the first time. Walking off the field in my college career, I got to play catch with him on his birthday, which is just kind of very meaningful.

He's been at every single game my entire career. I can't thank him enough for all the support he's given me and the rest of my family has given me. It's just a really cool moment to win that game, especially for him on his birthday.

Q. How did you get that fumble back?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, you know, one thing I should have done, it was an RPO, or I should have ended up just (indiscernible) it back to not worry about the handoff and go block that guy, but I ended up doing it anyway.

Got the strip sack. I saw his body bounce up in the air along with the ball, and I saw a quick second, and I was able to stick my arm in there and get my arm over top of it. Underneath those piles, you don't want to know what happens under there, but I just fought for every inch of that and was able to get the ball back there.

Q. DJ Vonnahme, talk about how that connection has been working.

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, he's been awesome. Honestly, I've kind of mentioned him a lot throughout any of these press conferences. He's the guy that was a walk-on last year. He's just been growing every single day.

I think even started maybe the fourth or fifth string this fall camp. He's continued to work. He's continued to get better, stay after or get extra reps with me after practice and meet with us and watch film together. He's just been growing and growing and growing, and it's been really awesome to see.

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Honestly, he played an awesome game today. He was deserving of the MVP as well. I'm just really excited to continue to see how much he grows in the next year or two years that he has left here.

Q. Winning two national championships as a Jack Rabbit, how did that prepare you to come to Iowa and the Big Ten?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, we played in a lot of big games throughout my career and played a lot of great teams and played with a lot of great players as well. A lot of people that I learned from and how to be a better leader, how to be a better teammate, how to get through tough wins and how to win too. It's not always easy to continue to win, continue to stay confident, always be working hard throughout all the practices.

It's been a long road. I've learned a lot from it, and it kind of really helped me set up the way this Iowa culture is. A lot of it is a lot of close people, a lot of great relationships and guys that are willing to work hard every single day.

So kind of coming into the culture like that, it was very almost seamless for me to come in here and work with so many great people, build those great relationships, and we were able to show it on the field as well.

Q. What are you going to remember years from now about this year that you spent with the University of Iowa and learning from Coach Ferentz and such?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, this was one of the universities I always looked up to and was always watching growing up as a kid. It was just a great opportunity to get a chance to play here, play for the Big Ten, the best conference in the country.

There's so many different memories that I'm going to remember in just being here at Iowa. The fans have been awesome. All of the support staff that we have here have just been helping me along the way and have done a great job with that.

I can't put my finger on one thing that is going to be the most memorable thing, but this opportunity that I was given, I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Q. Was there ever a point early on this season when you had some injuries and you had some early-season struggles where you said to yourself, man, I don't know if this is going to work out, this move? If so, how did you overcome that? How did you keep the faith?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, with injuries and even some of the beginning of the season struggles, I don't think that thought ever crossed my mind at all.

We have so many great people here that they have that "no quit" mentality. They always want to play for the guy next to them. There's so much love amongst this team that everyone wants to make everybody better, especially even at practice.

Having the faith and having the confidence of all the guys that they still continue to believe in me, even though with some of those shortcomings at the beginning of the year, I can't thank them enough for continuing to believe in me and continuing to believe in the offense and continue to push through and were able to respond and be the reason in a couple of games this year which is really awesome to see from this offense and continue to build that standard.

Q. (Question about the Wig & Pen play).

MARK GRONOWSKI: How did you guys know that's what it was called? Yeah (laughing), I know. It was an awesome opportunity that we got. I was happy that Coach called it.

We've been running it all week in practice, and then again, another shout-out to Wig & Pen. Scoring a touchdown on a play like that, it was really fun. I mean, DJ also made a great play on that one as well. You know, being able to get the jump up and making a catch over a defender, it was a great way to kind of start off. I guess that was the second half, I believe. Yeah.

Q. How much have you played in your life? When do you tip your cap to the Iowa fans before you (off microphone)?

MARK GRONOWSKI: Yeah, it's always an emotional time when you are coming off the field for the last time. Obviously I'm not going to playing in another college football game. So play so many games with so many different memories and so many different people that I've met along the way that have just made a huge impact on my life.

Not only is it a tip of the cap to the fans, but a tip of the cap to the game as well. This game has given me so much, so many friendships, so many life lessons that I'll really cherish for a lifetime.

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