

TransPerfect Music City Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Nissan Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Head Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference

Iowa-21, Kentucky-0

THE MODERATOR: Coach Ferentz will make a couple of remarks and then we'll open it up for questions.

KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon. Obviously, really happy for our team. It was a great team victory today and just really proud of them.

You know, the work that they've done this entire month and then obviously they did a great job down here in Nashville and had a great experience. Appreciative of Scott and everybody with the Transparent Bowl. It's been absolutely fantastic. I said transparent again. TransPerfect. I'll get that right. Son of a bitch.

No, just really happy for our guys. Just really happy for our guys. Especially our seniors. What a way to send them off. It's been a great group, and I can't thank them enough for all they've done.

Each and every one of these guys has really embodied what it means to be a Hawkeye. You talk about the guys that are seniors, the senior captains, or a kid like Tommy Hartlieb, Dallas Craddieth, you know, big tackle on special teams. Just a really special group.

Bowl games are a little bittersweet because of that. You have to say goodbye to those guys, but just couldn't be more proud.

Then the other aspect obviously a chance for some younger players to step up and do some things. You know, one of the fun things with keep coaching about a goal game, you watch younger guys develop and grow. Saw a lot of that during the course of this past four weeks.

You know, coincidentally Jaz Patterson took it there at the end and had a couple of good runs. He is a young guy who just quietly has been grabbing opportunities and doing



a great job.

You talk about Cooper. Obviously, he had a great game. Joe Labas might be as valuable as Cooper just in the fact that he didn't make any critical mistakes out there, and that's easier said than done. You know, just proud of the way he handled things and got thrown into it pretty suddenly.

So, you know, just happy about the younger guys' development. Obviously, we have a big leadership void. I think as much as anything I think this group of seniors, the contributions they've made leadership-wise just invaluable. Just happy about everything on that front.

And then, unfortunately, I have some sad and tragic information to share with you. Jack Campbell's grandfather passed away last night. Was involved in an accident here. Mr. Smith, I can just tell you this from personal experience, had a really big influence on Jack's entire life. He was very close with him, helped parent him.

I know he was here to cheer on his grandson. Very, very proud of Jack, and just has a great mutual relationship, the two of them had. Our hearts are certainly with the entire family, Jack and his entire family, as they grieve. It's tough to deal with (choked up).

I know he was a great influence on Jack and a great Hawkeye on top of it, and really appreciative of that. Sorry to drop that on you, but transitioning to questions.

Q. Coach, can you talk about that two pick-6s and how important they were today?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, huge. We knew what we were up against. In some ways both of us were looking in the mirror a little bit. Stronger more veteran on defense, both teams. For us playing clean football offensively is a starting point. I was confident Joe could do some things and get some things going.

Defensively certainly that was going to be paramount, and we've ridden that all season long. You never count on the touchdowns, but the field position part. And then the third

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ingredient was our special teams play.

I joked with Tory. We should have made him a captain earlier, I guess, but he couldn't have had a better game. He punted great, and it really impacted the field position.

Then if you give our defense a chance, they might do some good things, and both great plays. Cooper is hardly a veteran, but he has played. And then for X to get that one, that was great for him in his first start too. So you get some young guys getting some valuable experience and having a great experience.

Q. Amplifying on Tory, can you begin to explain what a difference maker he has been?

KIRK FERENTZ: He has been outstanding. Watching the growth over three years is probably the neater part, and that's one of the fun parts about coaching. You know, had a couple of games where he wasn't as sharp. I don't know if I have seen him sharper than what I saw today. He was on it. Just on it every time.

We had great respect for their returners, both on kickoff and then also the punt. So that was something we were really are focused on. Especially No. 2. That's why Dallas is tackling, and that kickoff was so good.

Yeah, but Tory's work is just -- a lot of people it's not that big of a deal, but just in the second half I think it was, you know, we punted down there and got the ball back. We gained 20 yards field position. It was the first second-possession in the third quarter.

So all those little things that aren't very interesting to people make a big difference in games, and then if you have a good defense, it gives you a chance.

Q. On Xavier's pick-6, it looked like it switched from more of a cover-three look as opposed to more of a cover-four. Do you think that impacted the play at all? And then, of course, what he was able to do once he caught it, it seems to show what he is capable of doing.

KIRK FERENTZ: We play mostly zone, and hopefully not too obvious with what we're doing. Yeah, it was a good heads-up play. Again, Bowe both teams were playing with new quarterbacks, so not making those critical errors was big. And then our guys capitalized the ball. It sailed a little bit, and he was there. Then forever it seems like.

Our guys have done a good job. We do a good job of turnovers and making them offensive opportunities, if you will, and that's coached. Those guys know where to go,

where to get. Did a nice job of getting behind his blockers. Our guys saw hustle when there is a turnover. They're trying to make it more than just getting possession. It's good coaching.

Our defensive staff I think does a great job. Flipping over to the offensive staff too, I think, again, we knew our challenges here, and to navigate it the way we want to was really -- it was a good effort by all three phases.

Q. How much have you seen Xavier grow over these last few months?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not saying he's Cooper, but if you remember, Cooper was not a household name a year ago. At least in November. So, again, that's what we get to watch is you watch guys get confidence. The world we're living in now, it's just going to happen sooner than it used to.

I used to redshirt guys so frequently, but those days are gone. You watch him doing things on special teams, and that's usually where especially with the perimeter guys, you start getting a good feel about a guy. He has been doing that. He has been -- he is attentive. He has a great attitude and works hard, and that goes back to January when he showed up.

So for him to get his first experience, I just asked him if he was nervous. I didn't want to talk to him before the game. He said, no. That's what he came here for, to play. So it was really good to see him step in there.

And Koen Entringer has done a nice job too. He had an injury in December otherwise he would have been in here a little bit too.

You have three guys back there. You don't want to lose a guy. Kaevon went here, but good to see younger guys step up and go.

Q. Seven straight seasons, not counting the COVID year, that you have won at least eight games. What does that mean to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll factor in COVID too because it was well over 61% or whatever percent that is. Yeah, I think it's significant. Winning in college football is not easy. I think it's significant if you look at the other four teams that have done it.

Oklahoma dropped out. It was six coming into the year. We're still there, and those other teams, you don't see us recruiting against them too often.

So it just says a lot about our players. Like I said, these seniors, you know, feel an obligation to the program to uphold the standard, and that's what the game is all about. Guys getting that message. It's pretty simple, but it's hard when you have 120 guys show up every day with a good attitude and put it on a stage working. Those are habits that will really help them down the road, whatever they do professionally, being a parent, being somebody that's a member of a team in a company, a school, whatever you are doing. It's a beautiful part about football.

Q. Sam said the more you put into the program, the more you get out of it. How would you kind of accentuate what he means by that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I agree. Pretty good example is the three guys that -- I don't know if Riley was here, but the three senior captains. And Kaevon same way, and then Tory.

That's life, though. It's you get what you get. What you give, you get it back. Typically. Sometimes it takes a while, but you get it back, and I've always believed that, I guess.

Q. What did you see from Joe Labas in his first career start?

KIRK FERENTZ: If you had seen him two weeks ago, I'll get in trouble again. I got in trouble last year with this one, but if you saw him two weeks ago, whoa. The first couple of weeks were really bumpy, but last week he settled down a little bit. Just an example, teamwork and being a good teammate.

Petras was with him every play, and Carson had to get in the huddle with him every play even last week. So just guys helping each other out. His growth, that's growth he wouldn't have gotten until the opportunity opened up. He had a great attitude. He has really worked hard. I thought he did a really good job today.

I don't mind telling you, we were worried about the 25-second clock. Let's just start there. Getting the ball snapped before that. I don't know how close you watched pregame, but we had a center/quarterback exchange, of course, on the first play. That stuff isn't really reassuring sometimes.

He played with poise out there, and he has a little juice to him too, so that's fun to see.

Q. Kirk, we've talked rightfully so about Jack Campbell. But Riley Moss is a guy that maybe wasn't going to come back. He ended up coming back. I

guess I saw the emotional moment you two had on stage, but what has Riley Moss meant to you and the program?

KIRK FERENTZ: So, yeah, last year, whatever, December or whatever, it was when we had that little break and the guys came back. Both within, like, five minutes of each other, Campbell and Laporta walk in my office and say, I'm back for next year, we're not going anywhere. Great.

Riley took it into January, and I really didn't think he would come back, but I think his decision was well thought out. I think he had great guidance from his family.

This year, no questionably has helped him in his future. He would love to play in the NFL. My big concern with him coming back, and I've told the NFL people this, is, okay, you get a guy back for that year maybe you're not counting on, so what's it going to be like? First guy out there on the field every day in spring ball and worked his tail off every day. That's how he does things.

Doing the pregame thing yesterday Louis Riddick just commented about how impressed he was, and Louis played defensive back. We were together in Cleveland.

Again, it's that example of a guy coming back with the right attitude and just building on. I've always believed players improve. Good players improve if they have the right attitude.

That's what you are talking about with Riley. What a great guy. That's the fun part about football.

Q. New quarterbacks on both sides, but for your defense as good as they've played all year to cap this off with a shut-out, the first in this bowl's history, how is that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but one thing I've learned, if they can't score, you're not going to lose. I know that.

If we could have written the script today, it was perfect. Just really happy. Again, it's a testament to the way our guys prepare and just the work that they put in beyond the practice field. Those guys are really committed to it, and there's a standard. It's great to see. I'm just really proud of those guys.

Q. I've been covering your team for about the past four seasons, and I never have seen you emotional like that when you hugged your players up on the podium and get fears tears in your eyes. Can you describe the emotions you were feeling at that moment?



KIRK FERENTZ: It's probably amplified a little bit. The things I talked about in December here, all this stuff going on that just doesn't make sense in college football, quite frankly. That's a whole discussion for a different day. There's a lot of things that frustrate you a little bit or you wonder, you know, what the hell is going on?

But the single best part about coaching is being with the guys. When you have guys like we've got, that's the best part of the day. I quit golfing 30 years ago, thank God for everybody. If I was good at golf and liked golf, that would be like golfing, right, but I don't golf, so I would rather be around our players.

Again, you have guys that are buying in and just focussed on the right things. That's what makes it fun. Makes it really valuable.

Q. Unless I missed something, Van Nuys didn't play in the first quarter. Was there any reason for that? And then do you think he will be back next year?

KIRK FERENTZ: We'll see. Time will tell. No major reason, and time will tell. We'll see. Hope so. Hope a lot of guys are back.

Q. Castro has built a reputation of being a sure tackler, but today he had some really nice plays in pass coverage. How would you describe how he has --

KIRK FERENTZ: They tested him. They went after him, and I thought he played great. That guy was fast, the guy he was covering.

So we talked about X stepping in. Same thing with Sebastian. He played a lot of snaps all season, but he just keeps improving. He is a tough, hard-nosed guy, and he cares and works hard. So that was a tough matchup, but I thought he played well. He was a factor in the game certainly, and it's just that next man in, next man up concept. Again, the guys buy into it.

Q. That catch that Sam had and he broke six different tackles, it was kind of like TJ a few years ago. This is probably even better I think to put you in a scoring position. How do you sum up a play like that just by watching it?

KIRK FERENTZ: He is all football player. He was that way -- I tell the NFL guys, when he came here, he was pretty good at receiving and that kind of stuff. Never blocked.

But the guy is just all football player. He truly loves the

game. He loves competition, and he loves doing it with a bunch of good guys.

So going back to him, you get some of these guys, these guys are pretty rare. This group is pretty rare. Sam is right there. I mean, he is just unbelievable. What a football player he is.

You mentioned TJ. That was the biggest play in the game back in '18 I guess it would have been, right? '18. The one-yard pass that he took down because, you know, we're kind of up against it there. Shifted field position, and then made them go the long field. That was a huge play in that game.

I actually said last night when I told him, I said, you know, biggest play -- biggest pass play in the Orange Bowl was Tony caught about a three-yard little in-and-out and took it 50 or whatever it was. That's football sometimes. To have guys like Tony, TJ, or Sam, and that's how good things happen.

Yeah, what a good story he is, and then it was fitting that Luke finished it off because, boy, has he become a good football player.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

KIRK FERENTZ: Appreciate it, thank you.

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