

University of Iowa Football

Media Conference

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Kirk Ferentz



KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. It's kind of a little bit interesting, the last three or four times I've been in our locker room, there's a TV in there that's playing, and I keep seeing the Green Bay/Detroit playoff game from whatever, it might have been '96 or '97. So I assume that's tied in with Brett Favre going into the Hall of Fame, but it's kind of interesting, kind of like groundhog day over in our building right now.

Again, just want to welcome everybody and say thank you and let you know we appreciate your commitment to covering our team. I think your coverage of our team really adds to the relationship that Iowans have with our team and our program, so appreciate that and appreciate your efforts.

I mentioned in Chicago, certainly this year is going to be very, very different without Bob Brooks sitting front and center and having his recorder here. I think as all of us know, all of us have been around Bob and worked with Bob, what a special human being he was. Certainly he had a great love for his profession, and did it extremely well. I think that love is only exceeded by his love of the University and Iowa in general, and most importantly the teams that he covered, the people that he worked with, I think that's really what made Bob so special. Just want to, again, recognize his work, and what a span of great work that was. We're all going to miss Bob, and I know all of you feel the same way.

Last year was a really historic year in a lot of ways, more importantly a memorable year and a very rewarding year, and I think probably the important thing for us as a football team is to try to learn some lessons. We've done that as we move forward.

Back in January, as I've said many times already, now that we turned the page on last year, we moved on to a new year, and with that comes new opportunities and new challenges. Some of those things we've already faced, some things that are ahead of us right now, and I think the most important thing right now, we've done a lot of quality work. We've got a lot of good work in the bank thus far as we start preseason practice.

And then obviously we've got a lot of very important work in front of us in the next three weeks. What we do in camp really is going to have a lot to do with how our team will be defined, how it will be shaped. This

happens to be a really important time for us as a program.

Basically since 1999 when we got here, our goal has been the same, to be Big Ten champions, and I think what it comes down to, all you can ask for is opportunity. We feel like we do have a solid foundation built right now, feel really good about the staff, I alluded to that last year, and pretty much in whole we're going in as a staff into year four together now. I think '13 was kind of a pivotal year for us, and I like the blend of the guys we have on our staff, no matter how you look at it, talk about age, experience level, ties to the program, be it as players, as coaches, et cetera, connection, plus we've got guys from the outside with other opinions, other viewpoints, what have you. So I think we've had a lot of good dialogue as a staff and I'm really pleased with the way things are shaping up in that regard.

I feel really good about our players. We've got a good group of players that have been working hard and have been committed, and we expect that to continue. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Hansen Performance Center and the impact it has had. We moved into it a year ago as I stood here, you saw it in a little different light in terms of recruiting, but I think probably the thing a year later right now, just the way it allowed us to function as a staff and as a football team in terms of efficiency, being able to really be streamlined and efficient with our movements, our energy, all that type of thing. It's been absolutely fantastic.

It's a first-class facility and we're very, very appreciative to have such a great place to go to work every day.

As a staff things haven't changed. Every year we evaluate, we look at what we're doing, try to learn from the good and the bad and things we might be able to do that might be a little different, any adjustments, tweaks that might fit what we're trying to do, and this year has really been no different.

Certainly one of the things we talked about in the out-of-season was bowl preparation, just having a better approach or a different approach perhaps. We also got to experience playing in a championship game for the first time, which was new territory for us, so I think we had good conversation on that.

But it really carries over to every phase of the program, whether it's strength and conditioning, recruiting, our day-to-day operations. I think we're in a good place right now, and that'll change on a daily basis too, I'm sure. But really at the end of the day it just gets back to focus on fundamentals and being good at the basics, and that's true in every phase of our program. All the goals that we have, whether they're academically, citizenship or football-wise, it all gets back to that.

Success requires dedication. It takes a lot of hard work, positive attitude, and people that have character. I think maybe as important as any, the thing that really defines success for us is our attention to details and the amount of teamwork.

Those are things that we have in mind as we start camp here. We're three days into it right now, two days without pads, and today is our first day with shoulder pads, so the guys are up and running. They're doing good, attitude has been good, and it should be after three days. We realize we've got a lot of work to do, and I think the team is eager to move forward.

Q. How is your field goal kicking and your punting? I know you need a new field goal kicker and punter. Do you have any idea who can fill those roles for you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, one thing about college football and really it's pro football now, too, pro football doesn't have graduation, they have retirement, and then free agency, all that type of thing. Every year we're going to be looking at situations or positions where experience becomes a factor or a lack of experience in that case, and certainly the specialists are both areas we're really looking hard at right now. Again, we're only three days into it. But I think going back to the spring, we saw some good things from our guys. We didn't see the consistency that we need, and that's going to be a big discussion point as we move forward here the next three weeks.

We've added a couple players. Ron Coluzzi is a punter, and then a couple freshmen as placekickers have entered into the competition that are in camp with us now. We're going to let the guys compete, and we'll make judgments as we go down the road. But I'm encouraged, and I'd really say the same thing about defensive end, receiver are the areas we're looking at new players.

Q. How has CJ been with the other quarterbacks? Has he been a mentor, but still competitive?

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. He really hasn't changed since he got here other than matured, and that's what you hope for every football player, CJ Beathard. The first thing that always comes to me with him and it's like

a lot of our guys, he's just a really good young man, great guy to work with, and at quarterback that's a really important trait. You need to have a guy that's a team-oriented guy, and we've been very fortunate that way. I think all of our guys have kind of thought that way.

CJ has been excellent. I don't think he views himself as a dean of quarterbacks or anything like that. I think he looks at it with a real critical eye and knows that he can still improve and get better, and he's been tremendous, was great with Tyler last year. Tyler got a lot of work because CJ missed so much time. Certainly beneficial. Drew Cook the same way and Ryan. Ryan is working at receiver right now, but same, I know Nate Stanley has joined us.

He's really a model teammate that way, and at the quarterback position, the things that he can share, the experiences he's already had are really invaluable for younger players.

Q. When you look at Akrum Wadley, he flashed a couple years ago, he played well at times, but then the fumbling issues, he also had maybe maturity issues off the field, and then he got thrown in the deep end against Northwestern. What have you seen of him in this off-season? Has he grown the way you wanted him to grow, not only physically but matured mentally?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're not home yet. Probably with Akrum I'll never say he's home until he's out of here. He's not home, or at a different home. But yeah, he's really grown, and I think that Northwestern game was a real pivotal point in his career, at least I hope it was, and I can't document this, but my suspicion, my feeling that day was that he knew we needed him, and I think he really paid attention to some of the things that maybe have kept him off the field. Ball security, it starts with that. But yeah, we've seen him grow since the end of the season last year.

I think he's had a good out-of-season. He's not quite there yet, but he's practicing well on three short days, and I think that's one of the neat things about college football, football in general but certainly high school and college football, players have I think an opportunity to grow and develop a little bit more dramatically maybe than some guy that's 32 years old, that type of thing.

We're seeing good things from him thus far and really eager to see how the season unfolds for him.

Q. Have you ever voted in the coaches' poll?

KIRK FERENTZ: No.

Q. Have they come to you?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think I've been invited. I'm guessing invited preseason watch list. I think everybody gets invited if you hang around long enough.

Yeah, you know, I used to -- decades ago, not years ago, decades ago, I thought coaches should be the ones voting. The only problem with that is we never see -- other than the teams we play or the teams in our conference, we don't see anybody on film. It's not like you watch a lot of TV. For me to -- and full disclosure, I have not seen Clemson yet this year. I've seen some clips and all that kind of stuff, but the night of the championship game I was on a plane flying to the convention.

So I guess what I'm saying is, at least in my case, I'd be the worst possible guy to ask about any team other than the Big Ten. So that's the reason I don't do it, and I don't want somebody else voting for me, telling me who to vote for and then me voting.

Q. My thought was going to be you that you received a 15th ranked national team out there.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it just so happens I did a little research on that. That might surprise you.

What I found was it's kind of like the Big Ten picks. Of the 25 teams that were in the preseason last year, eight of them didn't make the cut at the end, and then eight teams didn't make it, entered in. Probably most noteworthy I think would be Houston won 13 games, we won 12, neither us were mentioned a year ago at this point. So the thing I think our players need to understand is that door swings both ways. It opens and it closes.

And then I'll give the pollsters some credit because they got for the most part Ohio State and Alabama right. They had them in flip-flopped order, but they went out on a limb and picked two teams. That's noteworthy. Preseason polls are kind of like rankings of recruiting classes, too. It really doesn't matter until you get there and start doing something.

Q. CJ seems like he's the kind of quarterback that makes guys around him better. How does he do that and how do you guys see that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not saying he's Brad Banks, but there are some parallels in the way he carries himself and just the way he does things, and Brad -- you know, one of the great all-time stories in college football, let alone Iowa football, just his story, especially the way he came back from some adversity and that tough loss out there.

But the thing about Brad was just the way he did things and the way he was, like people just kind of gravitated

towards him. I don't know if I can articulate what it was about him, but I know this, it was really powerful, and as he went, our team really went with him.

CJ has kind of got that same characteristic. There's just something about him. And the commonality there is they're both genuine people. They're just really genuine guys. They've got all the right motives and agendas. They're just out there to help the team win, and they care about their teammates, all those things you hope a quarterback can do.

And then different skill sets but yet very effective players in their own right, and no matter how you judge a quarterback, I think those are really important starting points.

Q. How set is the offensive line? Is there room for anybody to move up into the top spot?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's plenty of opportunity. It's kind of like last year, it's interesting, Cole Croston, who was second team going into the season, ended up playing more than either of our tackles. You just never know how it's going to go, and two positives I'll give you. We have some good experience right now in our group, and then secondly, we've got versatility. We have guys that can move around. Cole can go left or right, for instance. Ike has played inside as well as tackle, Boone Myers obviously did that same thing, while Sean Welsh has played guard, center, tackle.

So when you have flexibility like that, that really helps you because typically during the course of the season, at least last year was a great illustration, we had a lot of moving parts whole football team injury-wise. If your better players can be versatile then it gives you a chance to put younger players in and just kind of keep them in one spot, which I think that helps a lot sometimes.

Q. Your top two fullbacks combined for one carry last season. Anyone who watches your team knows the value Macon and Adam had. Talk about the field of guys you have now competing for that spot?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I just got done talking about CJ and Brad, and I think you talk about Adam and Macon, same thing comes to my mind. The way they carried themselves, the way they operated, even though it wasn't a glamour position and they're not on the field all the time, just the way they operated, and I guess we could probably talk about our whole senior class last year, all 21 guys, that's a big void, and those guys were two excellent football players, started out three years before that as guys that converted from linebacker, and just really grew into the position.

You know, we miss that production. We also miss whatever it is they added to the team, and they're both strong leaders. The good news is I think we have some guys that are really capable, and they're doing a really nice job, too, Drake Kulick, Brady Ross, go right down the list. I think we have some guys that are going to do just fine.

They're not as proficient just like Macon and Adam weren't as good three years ago as they were last year, but we feel good about the position. Those guys are the unknown stories really. If you want to have a successful year, those are the kind of guys you have to have on your football team at the end of the day.

Q. When you look at Sean Welsh last year, he missed the spring with a personal thing, then he came back in, and then maybe played as well as any player on your offensive line last year. What kind of growth have you seen from him from last season to this season, and is he elevating by his level of play into that category where you had some really strong talent?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, time will tell on that, but he's a really quality guy. A really good football player, and the versatility part is a bonus you can't count on with any player, especially with offensive linemen, but when a guy has that ability to move inside, outside, or even play in the center position, that's a really good thing.

Yeah, we're pleased, and that's one of the reasons we feel like our line could be pretty good this year, but we're not there yet. We're still working at it, chipping away, but guys like that are really important.

Q. Is everybody healthy?

KIRK FERENTZ: The question about health, the only -- Jonathan Parker, he's in camp right now, you'll see he's got one of those little scooter deals. He had foot surgery about 10 days ago now, so he is clearly not practicing. I don't know, we're probably looking at weeks here, I don't know how many at this point, and then we've held some guys out of camp that had injuries, Jake Sobotka, Mitch Keppy, Mike Slater, and then Austin Schulte, one of our freshman. Those guys are all out. They're coming off surgeries from this past year and not ready to go yet.

And then we've got a handful of guys in camp right now that either aren't practicing yet or limited, that type of thing, still working through some issues. But nothing major. So far, so good outside of J.P. That was unfortunate.

Q. What would make a successful season now that you did just come off a 12-0 year, and does that change the parameters?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really, and I think the starting point each and every year, although, again, I'll go back to '99, 2000, that would have been a wing and a prayer really to end up in Pasadena or in any New Year's bowl. But really since that time, we've felt like we've had an opportunity at this time of year, so to me the evaluation is what we do with the opportunities that are in front of us, and there are certain things you can't predict. We just got done talking about injuries. You can't predict those things, crazy things that can happen during the course of a season, a game.

So you play through all that stuff, but really it's what we do with the players that we have available each and every week and how we maximize opportunities.

The disappointing thing to end the year before was just that we left some really, I think, good opportunities out there, and those are hard to live with. The one thing about last year's football team, the thing I'm most proud of I think with our group, for the first 13 games, we really prepared well. We did a good job getting to the season and then we prepared well each week and competed, whether it was 11:00, 3:00, 8:00, it really didn't matter, our guys showed up and competed. If you do that, you have a chance to win more than you lose, and you have a chance to get some good things. But you still earn it all. It's like rankings; right now they mean nothing because nobody has won a game yet in the country.

Until you start playing and really doing things, things that are meaningful you earn.

Q. What are you looking for at the safety position?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, first of all, fill one starting void. But I think we had certainly good safety play last year. Miles was a guy who was really playing as a first-time full-year starter, so we're expecting him to really accelerate his play and that's going to be critical for our whole football team. Anybody that played last year has got to play better, and I think he knows it, and he should. He's a younger guy, so expecting that from him.

Brandon is a guy who's really done a nice job, did a really good job on special teams last year. He's gotten a lot of good work behind Jordan at that free safety spot, so we anticipate him really stepping up and moving in there and doing a good job.

That's a bit of a cerebral position, so he's got to have some leadership traits back there and communicate well, not unlike a middle linebacker position.

I think he's done a good job in the spring. We like what we've seen over the course of the summer and these first three workouts, but we have to develop some

depth there, there's no question about that.

Q. What do you think about -- does it matter to you now that you play nine Big Ten games as opposed to eight before?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. You can do the math in the conference, and I think really the only impact that I see on paper is five games versus four; one year you're going to play five at home, the next year four so it's a disadvantage. But you could say the same. We've opened up the Big Ten on the road I think 14 out of 18 I think it is. Somebody did the math for me back in the spring.

You know, really doesn't matter. You've got to win them, that's the idea is to win those games. No matter who you're playing, it's going to be a challenge. Games are tough, and that's the mindset you have to have.

Just makes the math a little bit different.

Q. Where do you feel like you need help or are you seeing help? It's only been three days for true freshmen.

KIRK FERENTZ: We're going to have -- as far as true freshmen, we'll have a really open mind again. Last year we had four guys that played. We'll see how it pans out. I'll probably know more here in about three weeks and that whole deal, but again, I think the guys on the perimeter have a more realistic chance of entering in than guys on the interior.

But I can say this: Since they got going in June, Chris Doyle and his staff have really enjoyed working with the group. They've done a nice job academically, and three days on the field, we like what we see so far. A long way to go obviously, but I think that picture will become clearer, and if they can help us on special teams, help us with depth, we're wide open to it, or if they have a skill set that might be a little bit unique compared to what our older guys have, we're open to that, too. We want to win right now. That's our first goal.

Q. Is Shaun Beyer earning a spot on the roster?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he may do that. We may look around with him out wide, look at him. We're a little thin there, so we're play around with him for the first 10 days and see what looks best.

Q. When Desmond King decided to come back for his senior year, how big was that for your team on paper and what does he bring to the table?

KIRK FERENTZ: First of all, you can't recruit a guy like that in January, at least, not that I'm aware of. Even if a guy was as good as Desmond, a junior college player

that was the same age, which would be a little bit of a stretch I guess, but even if the guy was as good, he wouldn't know how to play as good in our system. Desmond has been here and done it very well and got thrown in probably ahead of his time and handled it very well during that Northern Illinois game. So right from that moment on, it's just been pretty much positive steps with him.

To get him back and then just the expertise, being part of the team, all those intangible things besides what he does on the field, those are all positive things certainly, and I think it speaks well. And I'm not judging anybody, but I think he realized that there is something special about being a senior. I think he saw that with our 21 guys last year, and I think it speaks well how he feels about his teammates and how he feels about the program and how he feels about being at the University of Iowa and living here. I think he's really embraced that and enjoyed it. I don't want to speak for his mom, but I think she would probably tell you the same thing, and then getting his degree is important to him and family, which is where it all starts.

It's all been really positive.

Q. You and your staff evaluate, you said one of the goals was to get better. How can he get better?

KIRK FERENTZ: There's not a guy that can't get better on our football team, and if they don't, again, we're going to be in trouble. That's really important. But every position, you're always learning if you're thinking right, and if you're really studying film and what have you. There's a physical part to it certainly, and then also a mental part to it, as well.

You know, one of the reasons he is so good and one of the reasons he was able to get his hands on the ball is he's got pretty good feel for the game. Maybe I shouldn't use that word. I'm always careful about saying a feel for the game or he's got good instincts because feel and instincts, those things are developed, they're not -- you don't just fall out of a tree with them. Some guys have a little better ability there maybe innately, but it comes from experience, from working hard, watching film, really thinking about what you're doing, not just going out there and doing it. There's a lot of thought that goes into it.

Just common sense would tell you if a guy is hungry and improvement driven, he's going to improve. He may not get as many interceptions. That's not the measurement, just like wins and losses aren't always the measurement, but it's what he's, how he prepares and all those kinds of things, and now that he is a senior can he be a little stronger leader for us because we just lost a pretty dynamic group. What's he going to add to that pool, as well. Those are all the kinds of

things we want our guys to think about.

Q. Bringing up the coaches' poll a little bit ago, this is a sport where perceptions actually do matter, they matter in rankings and who plays in what games and that sort of thing. Last year you guys were kind of nationally the whipping boys or your schedule and it was out of your control. Was there any discussion about that in your coaches' meetings?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, and I can't prove this, but I'm just guessing if we had won in Indianapolis, which we were really close, and as we all know, that doesn't count, right? But I'm just guessing if we had done it, then we would have been in the playoffs, and to me it's as simple as that. I would think -- you can't prove it, but I would think a Big Ten champion would have a good chance to advance, and certainly if we would have been 13-0, I think that probably would have been a sure thing.

Kind of goes back to -- you guys know better than I do, the year Auburn was undefeated and ended up third, right, because my release to be if you don't want to go to the playoffs and be one of the final two, be undefeated. That was a violation of that principle, but for the most part if you win enough, good things are going to happen, so we don't worry about that, we try to worry about winning, which for us is a lot more important. We need spending our time on that stuff instead of perception.

Q. At defensive end not so much new things, but where are you at with those guys?

KIRK FERENTZ: Again, we're still evaluating, but I would talk about a guy like Parker Hesse, who I just mentioned a little while ago, Desmond got thrown in that first game probably a lot sooner than he would have anticipated and he really responded well, and Parker was kind of in the same situation last year with Drew's injury, and so it was the school of hard knocks for him last year. He was undersized and went out and competed really hard. The things we thought we saw in recruiting, once he got on campus, we were pretty confident he had those traits, and I think they really surfaced last year, yet I'd be lying if I said it wasn't a matter of him surviving week in and week out. I haven't asked him that, but I bet if you gave him truth serum he would tell you that. He was undersized compared to the guys he was playing against that last Big Ten game, first-round draft pick, but the guy competes. He really competes. Now he's more mature, stronger, got a year under his belt, not quite a full year, so that's a big step for him. I thought the way he looked in spring, I thought we saw a different guy. I would say the same about Matt Nelson, who didn't play as much as Parker, probably got a better opportunity to

mature and play a little bit without having as much time on his hands. But feel pretty good about him. I think he's going to -- it's a little bit like we talked about the tackles a year ago. You see these guys practice, you know their traits a little bit and the way they're wired mentally and you watch them work every day, it just -- there's no guarantee they're going to develop into good players, but boy, it just seems like there's a real -- they're building a good résumé for that.

I feel good about that, and then Anthony Nelson is a guy that really did a nice job in the spring, too, and now he's four months older, is more mature, so I would start with those three guys right there. And Sam Brincks, too, who also is coming off a foot injury, and looks to be fully healthy out there. He's had three pretty good days.

We're going to be okay. It's just a matter of pushing it forward and getting those guys the game experience once we get to September.

Q. A lot of 6'7", 6'8" guys. What is the key to them on those lines?

KIRK FERENTZ: If we had a basketball team we'd be okay. A couple of the freshmen are pretty tall, too. It wasn't necessarily by design, that's just kind of the way it worked out, and it doesn't hurt. I don't think it hurts to have that length and that leverage, and if you know how to use it, it can be a real advantage, too.

And based on what I'm seeing in practice going back to the spring and then just three days, I think those guys have a little bit of understanding how to make that work for them.

Q. CJ has had a great career here at Iowa. At what point -- if it's a great game or a blowout, at what point emotionally and mentally as a coach do you decide we've got to take him out, we've got other quarterbacks that are hungry, they need experience?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it's kind of like everybody on our team. In my history at least has been if we get a chance to get guys in a game, which there haven't been a lot of those in 17 years, but if we ever do, I like getting guys in. I'm not worried about our stats or give up the shutout, all that stuff. Not that that's not important, but if the first team has a shutout and they leave the game, that's a shutout in my mind. What's important is I think guys work hard every day in practice, and if they have a chance to be rewarded through game time play, then that to me is that, and then the other way guys get on the field is somebody gets hurt, and boy, we need them, and they get thrown in there. But yeah, just I think that's just part of trying to build a team and being fair to your players.

Q. As a coach is that kind of a balancing act, though?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, the only balancing act is you never feel totally comfortable on the sideline. At least there weren't many of them last year. Maybe one game where we got in the fourth quarter and said, okay, maybe we can play some guys. Usually it's right down to the wire.

Q. There's a couple of northwest Iowa players on your team, Croston and Snyder, both walk-ons. What kind of impact do they have on the program and walk-ons in general?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's amazing historically that part of the state has been pretty good, and unfortunately we've lost a couple across the border, as well. But you talk about two guys that are walk-on players and the impact that Cole has already had and just how well he played last year for us, and at a time where we really needed him to, and it's a real tribute to his hard work. His dad was a really good player here. I got the good fortune of working with him. They were a lot alike except for the physical development, and Cole has had to work harder probably to get there, so it's a real credit to him.

And then Brandon was a guy who did everything well in high school. Every sport he was involved in they won. Just one of those guys. Seems to be a trait about free safeties, I guess. But so he got down here and has worked hard, and we've watched him improve with every phase, as well. We're all hopeful that he has a really good year this year and then finishes up with a great career.

Q. It seems like fans have high expectations. How have you dealt with that, kind of some of those preseason high expectations that people have?

KIRK FERENTZ: Again, I'm really -- I don't think I start looking at this year much differently than last year. It's a clean slate right now, and again, I think outside of the first two seasons, we've really had an opportunity to have a successful season and a good football team. Again, not that those teams weren't successful or good, but I'm talking about getting to good bowl games and having a chance to really be in the race in November, and that's what it's all about. I think realistically right now, just like last year or the year before, we've had a chance to put a good team out there, but we're so much in the middle of the road as far as developing right now. We still have a lot of work to do. Go back to last year, I think last year's team really made major strides from August 1st until September 1st, and that's what this team has to do, too, because we've graduated outstanding group of guys, and that's usually what happens when you have

a really good team. A lot of good seniors leave the building, so you've got to -- a lot of work at a lot of different levels.

But that being said, we have the potential, and we've got guys with a good attitude. What can we do? How fast can we get better, and how much better can we get? That's the race every team is running in the country right now, so it's exciting. It's fun. It's fun to be a part of that, especially these three weeks. Not much interference.