

# 4/12/2011: Kirk Ferentz/Tyler Nielsen teleconference transcript (premium)

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Below are written transcripts of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz and senior linebacker Tyler Nielsen from Tuesday's Big Ten spring football teleconference:

## **Ferentz's opening statement:**

*"It was great to get back on the field, certainly, with the players. It's always an enjoyable time of year. From that standpoint, it was pure football and pure teaching as opposed to game preparation, so that part has been enjoyable. We have got a relatively young football team right now, so we've got an awful lot of work to do, graduating a lot of good players over the last couple of years, and a lot of challenges. But we're excited about that. I think we've got some interesting young players coming up, too. It promises to be interesting, exciting, hopefully. We're just hopefully going to have a good week this week, turn the page and get ready for August."*

## **On any further updates regarding the condition of offensive lineman Dan Heiar:**

*"No. Just that he was involved in an accident. It's significant and we expect him to be hospitalized for awhile. We're just hopeful everything progresses for him in a good fashion."*

## **On whether he can comment on what happened specifically:**

*"There was an accident. There's not a lot to say. A one-car*

*accident, I don't know where that came from, but that is accurate. Right now, we're just worried about him having a full recovery."*

**On Nebraska joining the Big Ten and becoming a natural rival for Iowa:**

*"Yeah, certainly. It's going to be a different time period or different experience for everybody involved in the conference. It's exciting. I think most people are excited about the expansion. On a bigger picture up front, I think everyone is enthused about what Nebraska's going to bring to the Big Ten. It's just a high-caliber institution with a tremendous football program. That part's exciting, and then more locally, I think probably the most requested team or opponent through the years has been Nebraska, at least over the last 12 years since I've traveled around the state.*

*"I know people have always, when you go to events, ask about picking them up in a non-conference game, that type of thing. Outside of playing Iowa State, which is obviously a traditional intrastate rival, that has been the most asked question. Locally, I think there's going to be a lot of enthusiasm from people in Iowa. You get out towards Western Iowa, and they're obviously closer to Nebraska's campus than ours."*

**On the importance of spring ball in terms of instilling fundamentals with a young team:**

*"That's certainly important. We have a lot of work to do on that front. We are young right now, and probably like most teams, you always have, and at least for us historically, it's probably this way everywhere, you have a significant amount of guys who are missing time, guys who would probably be in your 2-deep. It's a great challenge. We have a young team, but it's a fun challenge, too. I think we're all racing against the clock right now, and you can only do so much in a given*

*period, so that's what we're focused on – just trying to move forward – and we're hoping to be a sound, fundamental football team next year. But right now, we've got a lot of work to do."*

**On whether there's a relief with getting back to practicing given the offseason Iowa has had:**

*"Yeah. I'll be honest. The guys know that's how I feel anytime we start spring practice. First of all, the thing you enjoy the most about coaching football I think is your time with the players. Certainly, that has accelerated over the last couple of weeks, and that's good. Then the other thing about spring practice is everybody's got a clean start right now. Everybody is 0-0 and everybody has a lot of questions that need to be resolved, addressed, that type of thing. It's always interesting, it's always different, and it's always good to be on the field again. It's usually pretty ugly, and that's what the spring looks like so far."*

**On whether quarterback James Vandenberg has had struggles or a smooth transition replacing Ricky Stanzi:**

*"That's kind of how I look at it. He's hardly a grizzled veteran. He came in in relief when Ricky got hurt in one game and then started the next two. That was a great experience and I thought he did a real admirable job in a tough circumstance, a very challenging circumstance over in Columbus two years ago. That was a great experience, and then a week later, it was a little different experience at home against Minnesota."*

*"That's all going to help, but the thing I was most impressed with was just how James prepared last year. I think all of us had total confidence had he been called upon to have done a nice job. I just look at him. I think he's a good football player that was... sometimes in your career you get stuck behind another good player. Ricky had a tremendous career here and will go on and play for years to come."*

*"So I think it was a situation where you had a pretty good*

football player that was playing behind another pretty good football player. We're all excited to see him perform this year. I think all of us are excited about what James could bring for our team."

**On whether there's any clarity to which running backs are behind Marcus Coker at this time:**

"Well, it's a pretty short list right now. I would tie that into the Vandenberg discussion. Marcus was a guy we had good feelings about last year, but unfortunately, he got hurt early in camp. When we saw him come back, and it was a real credit to him because he missed so much time yet he gained ground in a short amount of time, he got an opportunity and really did a good job. I think we have a lot of players on our team that are in that situation.

"But to answer your question, I think right now the two top guys are Jason White, who will be a senior, a fifth-year senior. Jason has done a real nice job and has improved with every opportunity, and also De'Andre Johnson, a guy who was hurt his senior year of high school, had an ACL issue, and really wasn't at full speed in the fall. It was tough to evaluate him, quite frankly, because he was not in good shape and his knee was not strong yet. He looks like a totally different player now. He just missed so much valuable time last fall and this is a really important time for him to get caught up on some things."

**On whether he feels the Big Ten Championship Game will help or hurt teams come BCS bowl time:**

"It will probably help the team that wins, I guess, right, and hurt the one that loses potentially once you're both undefeated. It's the trend in college football right now, and I think we're all excited in joining along with that. It's going to be a real exciting night for everyone in the divisional play, and certainly for the teams that make it to

*the championship game. It will be a great experience."*

**Nielsen's opening statement:**

*"It has been going by pretty fast, but you know, we have a lot of young guys coming in next year to fill in some big shoes. I think they're learned quite a bit this spring, and we're looking forward to finishing up spring ball and getting out full head of steam into the fall."*

**On how he felt James Morris performed last year and what he sees from him in the future:**

*"You know, he stepped in and did a pretty good job last fall. It was kind of a tough position to be in, stepping in playing middle linebacker, making all the calls out there on the field, but he did a good job. There are a lot of things for him to learn, especially at that position. I think he learned a lot of new things this spring, and hopefully all the things he has learned can carry over into next fall, and he can step up to the game and be an even better player next fall."*

**On how the defensive line looks given the losses of three starters from last season:**

*"Yeah, we lose a lot of good guys up front, but it's similar to a couple of years ago. The big question then was how were we going to replace guys like Mitch King and Matt Kroul, and guys liked Karl Klug and Christian Ballard stepped up and did it then. We expect the same thing this year. You got guys like Tom Nardo, Steve Bigach, Carl Davis, younger guys that you haven't heard of and older guys that haven't played much that are going to play a bigger role on the defensive line next fall. Then you got older guys, more experienced guys like Mike Daniels and Broderick Binns who have been out there playing a little bit. They can lead the group up front, and they'll do a great job, and we'll expect big things from them in the fall."*

**On the amount of excitement there is now with playing**

## **Nebraska:**

*"You know, it is a big deal over on the western side of the state. [Nielsen's hometown of Humboldt is] more in the central, but still, I think any time you get past the central half of the state to the west, you're going to start seeing Nebraska flags flying around, and the rivalry picks up over there. There's almost as many Nebraska fans on the western side of the state as there are Iowa State fans, so it's going to be one of those games that's going to be a tough fought game each year and it's a game we look forward to. I think they already named it 'Farmageddon' or something like that. Pretty neat, but it's something we look forward to. It will be a hard fought game each year."*

## **On what the reaction has been to the news about Heiar's accident over the weekend:**

*"I haven't spoke to him directly. I have heard from a few teammates about what's going on. It's unfortunate. We hope he gets better. We have a team meeting coming up and we hope to get some more updates on him and see if we can go visit him. We wish him the best and hopefully he is able to recover well."*

## **On being named recently to the Lott Trophy watch list:**

*"It's kind of a prestigious award and everything, but I'm not really worried about that preseason. I'm more focused on what I do on the field during the season and what I can do to help the team win. You know, if everything works out and I become a finalist, so be it. But really, what I'm focused on is just improving and being the best player I can to help the team out."*

## **On if he would like a rivalry trophy for the Nebraska game and what he thinks one could be:**

*"Yeah, we've got some rivalry trophy games out there. I said*

*earlier I heard they nicknamed the game already 'Farmageddon.' I think it would be kind of neat to have a trophy with a theme such as 'Farmageddon.' But it's going to be a good rivalry, and we're excited to play them."*

**On what the guys in the defensive backfield are currently bringing to spring practice:**

*"Yeah, it's a high-energy group back there. We have to replace a couple of safeties. There's a lot of competition this spring at the safety positions, and guys returning like Shaun Prater. He's real high-energy, and he's going to be flying around the field back there and making big plays. Then you got Micah Hyde with obviously well-documented big plays in the bowl game when he finished that return. Then guys like Greg Castillo and B.J. Lowery at the corner positions are going to step up huge for us this year. Jordan Bernstine is looking healthy, looking good. We expect big things from all of those guys."*