

# 10/4/2011: Kirk Ferentz teleconference transcript (premium)

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Below is a written transcript of Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz's teleconference on Tuesday with the Big Ten media:

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

*"It will be good to get back on the field. The bye week probably came at a good time for us. We needed some time to maybe heal some guys up and get a little rest, that type of thing. It feels like it has been a month since we played. Hopefully it won't look that way, but we'll get back to work today and certainly have our hands full playing a very talented team, a well-coached team, in a very tough environment."*

## **On what makes Penn State a good team in addition to Joe Paterno coaching them:**

*"It's a couple of things. They're always well-coached. You can say that about a lot of teams, but now we're talking about going back 40 years, they're very well-coached. They're very, very talented. They got a lot of good football players. They make you beat them. That's the sign of a good team."*

## **On what has made the mix at wide receiver effective thus far in 2011:**

*"You know, I wish I could tell you what the key is. But it's a little bit strange or different. We came out of August camp, and I was really in the tank about that position. We just*

weren't doing very well. We weren't catching the ball consistently. We felt good about Marvin McNutt, certainly, being our most experienced player, and really our only experienced player at that position. I was really concerned just because we weren't coming along. But you know, that's the one thing about young players and young teams. It's a very dynamic process.

"For whatever reason, the last couple of weeks we've started catching the ball better in practice than I've ever seen us really, and it's showing up on the game field. I think one other factor, too, Kevonte Martin-Manley had a little bit of a toe injury in camp, so I think that affected his performance. He wasn't really showing up. Then the last couple of weeks, he has really stepped up and done some nice things. Then Keenan Davis is, I think, finally realizing his potential a little bit. So I think the combination of those two things, but I'd say the whole group, even guys that aren't on the field right now, just the whole group is doing better. After 13 years, that's really good to see."

**On whether the game action had any effect on the development of other receivers such as Davis:**

"You know, I wouldn't have objected if it had happened last year with him. We certainly had plenty of need last year. I wouldn't have objected had we hit stride in Week One. Not that we've hit stride yet, but at least I think clearly we've caught the ball better the last couple of weeks. In fact, I'd even say in Keenan's case, in the game that we lost, he played pretty well. He had a drop that came at an inopportune time, but he was progressing. That's the neat thing about football, especially college and high-school football. All players progress at different times. The key thing is that they do progress. We're starting to see that with some of our younger players."

**On the importance of solid play at both punter and kicker this**

## **season:**

*"You know, on one hand, it has changed from last year. On the other, it hasn't. Two opposite stories. We had a great punter in Ryan Donahue last year. We really enjoyed having an NFL player for four years. He punted very well. Eric Guthrie has stepped in as a fifth-year senior, and we have been really fortunate. We've had some great stories from fifth-year seniors over the year – Eric Guthrie, Jordan Bernstine, Tom Nardo, just to name three. Eric, three years ago, I would have said was wasting his time. He was a great young guy. Wasn't the greatest punter in the world, but boy has he worked hard. He's enjoying a good senior year and that's a real tribute to his work ethic, his dedication. I'm really happy for him.*

*"And then Mike Meyer on the other side of the ball is a different story in that he played last year as a true freshman, had some ups and downs, but we really liked what we saw and liked his potential, liked his demeanor. I don't want to compare him to Nate Kaeding, but there are some parallels in the way he handled himself. Nate played as a freshman, too. I think Mike has really taken that year of experience and he has put it to good use now. I think he's having more fun with the game now than probably a year ago."*

## **On the changes to the secondary and what he saw in free safety Tanner Miller specifically:**

*"Well, I said back in August, we thought the months of August and September were going to be important to our team. We weren't really writing anything in permanent ink just because of our youth. But also to your point about Tanner, Tanner didn't practice in the spring. He had a surgery, which kept him out of contact. We felt like there were still a lot of things we had to learn about the group, and not that we're done yet, but as we got into this thing five, six, seven weeks, we just decided it looked like maybe our best combination at that time would be to put Tanner in at safety,*

move Micah [Hyde] back to corner, and we were able to put Jordan Bernstine in at strong safety. He missed the second game with an illness. Then obviously Shaun Prater has been a constant out there playing at the left corner for us for three years.

"I'm not saying we're 100 percent settled in, but we're at least comfortable and happy with the path it has taken so far. The biggest thing is we'll get B.J. Lowery back next week. He's a guy that we thought had starter's potential, too. So at least maybe we'll have a couple of options, and we still feel good about Collin Sleeper and Greg Castillo. Maybe we'll develop a little depth as we go along."

**On whether it's fair to say the secondary had a bigger growth curve than other areas:**

"Yeah. That's pretty much what I've been saying since last January. We had two very good teams, and have lost a lot of good players over the past couple of years here. If you go back to '08 even, we became a good team the second part of the season and had a great senior class on that football team. So if you look at the last three years, you look at guys going to the NFL, or guys that were just good college players, we lost some really good guys, and that's what happens when you have a good team. The fun thing is you just never know how this is going to turn out, how we're going to develop, how we'll progress. We got a lot of work ahead of us, we know that. But it's a team that has a good attitude and is working hard."

**On linebacker Tyler Nielsen being honored as a candidate for the Campbell Trophy:**

"Well, he's just a tremendous young person. He comes from a great family. Graduated from the School of Business here last May. Now looking forward, he's just a very, very intelligent guy, very mature. A semi-quiet personality, but he says things when they have to be said and everybody listens. He's just a

tremendous young guy. He plays the position, and I've talked about [James] Vandenberg being a guy we all thought could've started a year ago, the same thing with Tyler Nielsen. We felt like he could've easily been a starter for us in '09. He was positioned behind a pretty good linebacker in A.J. Edds, who was a three-year starter. I think they're very similar.

"A.J.'s with the Colts right now. Both those guys, excellent students, tremendous people, and Tyler has just made a lot of contributions, not only as a linebacker and special teams, but also just from his leadership and those types of things. It's great having him on our football team, and we're going to lose him here at the end of the year."

**On whether the dynamic of facing Penn State has changed into more of a rivalry given Iowa's recent success:**

"Maybe I'm not as starstruck now as I was 13 years ago. You look at it, if anybody who knows anything about college football, who doesn't know Penn State? You know, I don't care what part of the country you're from or where you grew up, so that's number one. You're going up against one of the all-time great coaches, if not the all-time greatest coach, and that might be any sport in college. Certainly, he has got to be in that discussion. And just the success they've had through the years. It's just absolutely amazing. It has been a great addition to the Big Ten. Hardly a new addition, but a great addition to the Big Ten.

"When you play a school that has the kind of tradition that Penn State has and in the type of atmosphere they present and all those types of things, it's just a lot of all the good stuff about college football. It's a great series to be in. And the other important thing is, if you want to have a chance to win, boy you better play well. It's been that way for 40 years, probably longer than that."

**On whether the players enjoy playing against Penn State:**

*"Well, if you like college football again, and I hope our players do, if you like college football, you got to enjoy playing in a game like this. It really just kind of comes down to who plays the best football. The success that we've had has come, and boy there is nothing easy when you play Penn State, and that's true any time you play any really good team. This is certainly the case. We know we're going to have to be at our absolute best, and it's hardly like we're any good right now anyway. We're going to have to really try to play the best possible football we can in a tough environment and hope that we can do O.K. But that's the fun in football, too, is knowing the challenge. It's going to be tough."*