

9/4/2012: 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:

"Certainly happy to get the victory. It was hard fought. A tough ball game. We anticipated that. Northern [Illinois] is a very good team and they're very well-coached. Played very well. A lot of great efforts out there and I'm certainly happy for Mike to be recognized by the Big Ten."

On evaluating running back Damon Bullock and what he thought Bullock did well against Northern Illinois:

"Well first of all, he finished the game. I think that's probably the biggest thing, the biggest accomplishment. He played a little bit last year. I think he had 10 carries the entire season. We had him going back between running back and receiver, so we weren't sure what to expect, quite frankly."

"Like a lot of guys, it was the first time he had played for any extensive period of time, so I'm just really happy with the way he performed overall. There are things he can do better. He knows that as well as anybody. But I think the biggest thing was he was able to play the entire game and do a good job that way."

On if he sees Bullock becoming a workhorse back:

“Well, we’ll see how it plays out as we move forward. I don’t know how much we envisioned that going into the game, quite frankly. It’s just the way things turned out. But the good news is his best quarter was the fourth quarter and it was true of our whole football team. It’s just good to see that. We’ll take it a week at a time. But I do know this – we’re going to have to play other backs, too. It’s a long season.”

On what concerns him the most after beating Northern Illinois last weekend:

“Well, like after any first game – at least typically – it has been 14 years now and I can’t remember one where you just walked out of there and said, ‘Boy, everything looked great.’ It’s really the first time that we’ve gone full speed against outstanding competition like that. So basically, every area. There’s not an area we can’t improve in and that’s going to be a fair amount I think for any team in the country. Typically, that has kind of been our M.O.

“We need to get better with each opportunity. I don’t think there’s an area we can’t improve in right now, so that’s kind of exciting on one hand. On the other hand, it’s very obvious that we need to improve fast or we’re going to be disappointed after Saturday’s game.”

On if there’s anything specific he plans to focus on in practice as Iowa prepares to play Iowa State:

“Well, not really. We are what we are and I think they are what they are. So it’s really a matter of how we match up against them. It really gets down to what we can control, which is our performance right now and how much can we try to improve during the course of the week. They played very well in their opener and I expect they’ll be a better team than we saw on film. But they played very, very well against a good team on Saturday. We got to keep our foot down and just try to move forward as fast as we can.”

On what made Iowa want to offer Bullock a scholarship even after he was dealing with an injury:

"You know, we were looking hard and we kind of came on him. We felt like he was being overlooked a little bit. But he played significantly his senior year. Missed that one year. But for whatever reason, people hadn't thought he was a real good player. There were some things we were concerned about and it was ironic I guess. I wasn't quite so sure how fast or nimble he was based on looking at his high school tape. I think he has got plenty of speed and is very, very nimble. The fact that we played him at receiver last year would probably indicate that.

"That's probably the one thing – we didn't see his ball skills necessarily. They didn't throw to him an awful lot in high school. He does have very good ball skills. It has been a pleasant surprise and again, I think the biggest thing is we're out there ready to ordain him as the next coming out, but he had a good game Saturday and the thing I was most pleased with is he played in the fourth quarter and played strong in the fourth quarter."

On whether it's a lot of work for a younger player like Bullock:

"Yeah, a muggy day. And then on top of it, when a guy plays in his first game, you usually burn a little bit more energy. I've seen that happen, even before the game starts. So the fact he was running strong in the fourth quarter, I think that was a real positive and it's something we can build off of. Again, we'll have to get some other guys involved now, too. Greg Garmon got his feet wet a little bit, so we'll have to build on that and Mike Malloy as well."

On what makes traveling to the West Coast for a game during this time of year challenging:

"You know, it's probably the same reason it's hard for them to

come our direction. I haven't done a study on that, but I know Hawaii struggles when they come to the mainland and they're tough at home. I can just speak to our most recent series. We played Arizona State and Arizona and split with both of those teams – won at home and lost on the road. The only disappointing thing was we played Arizona last time and Arizona State, we played late afternoon and I was hoping for 11 o'clock kickoffs for both of those games.

“So you deal with the time change, you deal with a little different environment certainly and it's tough going on the road no matter where you go, so I think all of those things combined makes it a factor. It's a little different if you get a chance to go and spend a week there to get acclimated, but that's usually not the case with an in-season game.”

On how he would evaluate his team's D-line play in the win over Northern Illinois:

“Yeah, Dom [Alvis] is probably our most experienced player and Joe [Gaglione] is a senior, a fifth-year senior. We were hopeful he had practiced well going back to the spring. We were hopeful that the accumulation of work – he has had a lot of injury issues and this was really the first time he had gotten to work for prolonged periods. But the whole group, it was a start.

“It wasn't pretty at all times, but outside of one play – and you can't say that in defense because if you give up big plays, you can't be consistently good on defense – but we gave up a big play in that second half, otherwise we played pretty good on defense. Got off the field and did a pretty good job that way. It was a starting point and that's really kind of the scenario for our whole team right now, a starting point.

“Again, we were thrilled to get the victory. The oddsmakers were apparently more optimistic than I was going in there, but I was just happy to come out with a win and I was really happy

with the way our guys competed and fought. They did a good job that way, but we have a lot of things to work on right now."

On the challenges Iowa State poses:

"First and foremost, the thing that jumps out at me – Paul Rhoads went to Iowa State and it's pretty clear to me now a couple of years later here – but he really had a good idea of what he envisioned happening there. I think everybody goes into a place with a plan, but how well do you stick to that plan? Are you able to build an identity? I think they've done a great job there in that regard.

"They've got an identity offensively, they've got an identity defensively and they do a great job on special teams. They've improved their personnel with each year. They always play hard. They play very smart and very sound and again, they play to their identity and what they've chosen to be. It has been very effective and very, very tough to defend their offensive package.

"Defensively, they make you try to beat them and that's easier said than done. They compete hard and play well. And special teams, they did a great job against us last year with special teams. They're a good football team that's well-coached and plays with great effort."

On how often he needs to use last year's loss to Iowa State as motivation for the players:

"I don't want to speak for their team, but I'm just guessing – I think everybody involved with this game historically is ready. Typically, both teams are very highly motivated. I don't know why they wouldn't be. This is a huge game in our state. We don't have a professional team in our state unless you want to count the [Iowa] Cubs, but that's a different sport. So it's a huge game in our state. It's great for the state and I don't think motivation is a problem on either side of the coin.

"As far as last year, I think the one thing about it is if we don't learn from what we didn't do well last year, we're going to fall victim to that again. As I said, I don't think they've changed a lot from my vantage point. They've only played one game, but they are what they are and they do it extremely well. They really took advantage of some of the mistakes we made last year and quite frankly, outplayed us, out-coached us. Basically in all three areas. We're going to have to do a better job."

On how game day communication went among the coaching staff given the changes made in the offseason:

"I think really well. You know, we, again, I don't think we're unique. I think everybody, especially when you have changes, probably works on that over the course of the preseason. I know that we did. But that's one thing I've been really pleased with going back to the first week of spring ball. I think everybody has really hit the ground running and did a nice job with regards to that."

"And you know, there's a feeling-out process certainly. It was a little different Saturday than maybe it was in the practices, but I think the guys have done a great job with that. We haven't made a big deal of it. I don't think it is a big deal unless we had prepared. I think everybody has been doing well that way. The big challenge for us right now is we've got to improve our play on the field with each week."

On why he felt Marcus Coker left Iowa to transfer to Stony Brook and what he'll do playing there now:

"I don't want to speak for Marcus, but what he brought to our team last year really was just outstanding play. He's a tough, competitive guy. He played two years ago as a true freshman for us. Had an injury early in camp, missed probably 5-6 weeks, then came back in his first start and had 100-plus yards on the road and then finished up as the MVP in our bowl"

game with 200-plus yards.

“He’s a strong, tough runner and Marcus is a great young man. So what he’ll bring for Stony Brook, I don’t know what they did last week and I don’t know what he did last week, but my guess is he’s going to do a very nice job there.”