

9/24/2013: 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 was good to get the win obviously at home. We've finished up the non-league portion of our schedule and now we move on and start conference play. I'm sure everybody's excited about that. We have a tough task traveling to Minnesota and playing a very good Minnesota team."

On the play of his O-line and D-line and the toughness both groups have been able to provide so far in 2013:

"Well, I think we're making strides. We're not there yet by any stretch. But the guys have worked hard in the spring and camp and then certainly, you know, we're probably a little further along than we were last year at this time, which we need to be. So far, so good. But we still have a lot of room for improvement."

On if his team is like some of his good teams in the past that prided themselves on O-line play and having a strong run game:

"We're on the right path, I think. We're fortunate that we have two experienced tackles that are good players. They kind of set the tempo for the group. We're not as experienced inside at the other three spots, but our two tackles are doing a good job and [C.J.] Fiedorowicz is a good blocking tight end

as well, so that helps us out a little bit."

On how Minnesota looks in the trenches and how it compares to when Iowa played it a year ago:

"Yeah, I think the big thing is they're a more mature team, to me at least, looking across the line. They were 4-0 last year at this time, but I think they clearly are a more mature team than they were a year ago.

"They committed to playing some good young players a year ago and even before that and I think they're benefiting from that right now. It looks like the guys are very well-coached. They're on the same page, they're playing really hard and they're playing physically."

On if he sees more of a different offense in Minnesota now compared to what Iowa has faced before:

"I'm not 100 percent sure about that. But they just look very comfortable doing what they're doing and I don't know how much has changed schematically. Maybe the percentage is. But they're big and they're physical up front. They've got a lot of big guys, including their tight ends. Their fullback is an excellent blocker. So it's tough.

"Their best running back's out, but their other two guys are doing a great job, so they really have three outstanding tailbacks. Then the other big part of the equation, which they kind of had with [MarQueis] Gray a couple of years ago, is they have a quarterback ... well really, two quarterbacks that are playing well. [Jerry Kill] is using those guys extensively in the running game as well, too, so it's a tough preparation."

On if Iowa's preparing for both Philip Nelson and Mitch Leidner and if he sees similarities in the two Gopher QBs:

"Yeah, I think we have to be ready for both of them,

certainly. They're not exactly the same, but they are similar. The good news is I guess it's not as dramatic a difference between them. The bad news is they're both very, very capable and both have played really well this year."

On what makes Kevonte Martin-Manley an effective punt returner:

"You know, the thing that happened the other day, No. 1, he fielded the ball and one of those was a rugby kick. He saw the ball and was able to field it cleanly and that's a challenge. He makes good decisions regarding that. That's a good thing, and then the other part is he was smart about letting the blocking set up and the guys did a great job."

"I mean, both those returns, he didn't do them alone, but he certainly got them started and he finished them. Kevonte's not a burner. That's not his forte, but he's a pretty smart runner and that's an important position back there, certainly. So that was great to see that Saturday, but we're just pleased with the job he has been doing overall."

On if the "All Players United" (APU) movement at a few schools last weekend came up with his team:

"Nobody has really brought it up here. I just read something last night about it. I'm just not quite sure ... I don't know if it's with the video game deal or not. I don't know. I guess I haven't given that a lot of thought, to answer your question."

On his childhood baseball team (the Pittsburgh Pirates) reaching the MLB postseason and if he still follows them:

"Nothing odd about that at all. Beat 'em, Bucs."

On his memories of watching the Pirates while growing up in Pittsburgh:

"Yeah. When I was a kid, the Steelers finally came of age in the early 70s, but prior to that, they had many years of

futility. Looks like they traded it off to the Pirates because when I was a kid, the Pirates were very good and they had a lot of success. It was 'The City of Champions' in '79, both the Steelers and Pirates winning world championships.

"So it was a fun time to grow up in that area and then they fell on some hard times once Jim Leyland left there. They had some really good young players during the 90s and then for whatever reason, they had some problems. But they've certainly done a great job of building the franchise.

"It looks like they have a really marquee player in [Andrew] McCutchen and I think Clint Hurdle has done a wonderful job there, too. But the ownership and the organization is just committed to success. That's the good news. The bad news is they're in a really tough division with the Cardinals and the Reds. That doesn't make it any easier for them."

On if he was aware of how close Martin-Manley was to Kinnick's punt return record and if there was thought of preserving it:

"You know, somebody mentioned it through headphones there somewhere in the second half. Nothing ever came of it, you know. We love Kevonte, we're glad he's on our team and all that, but it is Kinnick Stadium. With Nile Kinnick, it's just unbelievable that he's even in the same category. That's an amazing feat. One of those rarities."

On the interior of his O-line preparing to deal with Minnesota's Ra'Shede Hageman this week:

"Well you know, just his physical size alone is very impressive. But he's a very experienced player and a very talented player and a guy that's a very dynamic performer. So he poses challenges and then they have other guys in there that are also I think very, very active, their other interior guys.

"They play two guys opposite Ra'Shede and both those guys are

really tough players to block as well. They play an even scheme with two interior guys and both those guys are going to be a tough match-up for us, I think."

On the news Tuesday morning of Penn State's scholarship reductions being modified:

"I'm not really familiar with ... did something transpire recently?

"I'd have to see the whole thing, but needless to say, I think the whole thing was a bad deal. So hopefully some steps are being taken to be a little bit more fair. I mean, that's just my hopes."