

10/1/2013: 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:

"We were really happy to get a win on the road against a very tough Minnesota team. It was a really hard-fought ball game on both sides and we're just pleased to get out of there with a win. Now we turn our sights towards a really tough opponent in Michigan State. They're playing good football and it will be a big challenge for us this week."

On what the most difficult element is in maintaining a solid Big Ten program like he has and like Mark Dantonio has at Michigan State:

"I just think any time you play in a conference like ours, you know, there's going to be a challenge every week, certainly, and every season. So that doesn't ever change and every season is unique, every game is unique, so it's just a matter of trying to stick with what you believe in and moving forward."

"From my observation, it seems to me like Mark and his staff started that well before they got there. They did a great job at Cincinnati and then when they moved to Michigan State, they just continued on with real quality work."

On if there's any element of recruiting at a school like Iowa or Michigan State that's more difficult:

"You know, it's always difficult because you just never know how things are going to materialize. Even if you're getting all 5-star recruits, there are no guarantees. It's kind of like the NFL Draft. Not every first-rounder turns out to be a first-rounder in terms of production, so there's always going to be that element."

"But you know, that's what makes college football so interesting, I think. I think you can look at just about any program. Those programs go through ups-and-downs and the other thing I would say is just like every program has, you have to decide who you are and try to play towards those things that you believe in. There's no one right answer or right way to do things."

On if there's any point during the first month of the season where the team's confidence level takes a jump:

"I don't know if there's one point, but I think it's gradually building. You know, we lost our opener, which didn't do a lot for anybody's confidence. But we knew it's just like any game. Anything can happen in any game, so we knew we were playing a really good football team and they were and are."

"You know, so you just keep pushing and every week's a different adventure, if you will. It's a different challenge and you just take it a week at a time. But I think if you're doing things right and if your team stays healthy, at least you have a chance to grow."

On the play this season of junior left tackle Brandon Scherff:

"Yeah, you know, he was really starting to play well a year ago and unfortunately, he suffered that injury. But he came back, he had a great attitude through the injury and the rehab. Then when he came back in the spring, he just went back to work. So it's good to see him hammer on."

"He struggled through some injuries two years ago, so his

performance was a little bit up-and-down. But last year, he was starting to come into his own and he's playing good football for us now. He's a very respected guy on our football team just because he works so hard and does things so well. He's one of those guys that practices hard every day and just has a really good demeanor. So as a result of that, as you might imagine, everyone on the team and in the program really respects him."

On how he would characterize Iowa's series with Michigan State and how close and physical it has been:

"You know, not to sound like Pop Warner, but I could go back to the '80s and think of how many close games we've had with Michigan State in the '80s and it seems like it has been more of the same since Mark came back to Michigan State. If you look at it, we've had two games that got away – they got away from us once and we got away from them once – but the other four games, two points, three points and then two double overtime games.

"I can't tell you why that is, but we've had some fantastic games. In close games like that, it usually comes back to there's always a handful of things that take place, you know, that really impact the game. My guess is we're probably looking at one of those again."

On what makes it difficult to run against Michigan State's defense and what Iowa will have to do this week:

"Two things. I think they've got a very challenging scheme. If you look at them on paper, it's not like they do all that much on paper. But I remember when I was in the NFL, the Steelers, they didn't really do all that much in terms of trying to stop the run, but there was a real method to their madness.

"Most importantly – I think this is kind of my recollection of the Steelers, too – is they had good players that played extremely hard and were very well-coached. You know, again, it

wasn't that much. But what they did do kept you from being able to feel like you were comfortable. It was just always a challenge. Their numbers, it's just a really tough team to run the ball against. Really tough."

On how much credit Jake Rudock deserves for Iowa's success on third down as an offense so far this season:

"I think you've got to give him a lot of credit. It starts with your quarterback, certainly, and that's, quite frankly, one of the more pleasing things I think that has happened in the last couple of weeks because we were really struggling in that area recently. So when you have a chance to convert, especially in the 3rd-and-5 plus deals, at least that obviously keeps you on the field and gives you a chance to keep moving and maybe score.

"But it's a team thing. The protection is always paramount and then certainly, receivers looking to get open and knowing where the chains are and doing the things necessary. So that's a positive and I just talked about the run game. It's the same thing. Their pass defense is really stellar. I think they might lead the country in pass defense as well, so you look at it and there's just not a lot of plays that are going to be easy, that's for sure."

On Rudock's poise and mental approach playing roles in his ongoing development:

"I would agree totally, and I think that's the thing that we've been the most pleased about. I don't want to say it was a surprise, but you just never know until you get in games. To be a successful quarterback, it sure does help if you have an awareness and just a self-control, if you will. So far, so good.

"He has done a really great job with that and when he does make a play that you know he regrets, he comes right back and keeps playing. He doesn't let it affect him and I'm not saying

it doesn't bother him, but it doesn't affect him. That's a good sign as well."

On if he notices anything different about Michigan State's offense given the number of quarterbacks the Spartans have used this season:

"You know, they're probably fairly similar in the sense that I don't think necessarily ... you know, every quarterback has his own personality, his own style. But it seems to me, and again, I'm an outsider looking in, but it seems to me like that they're kind of where they want to be.

"They probably didn't score as many points as they would've liked to in their last game, but it looked to me like they're moving down the road they want to move down, which is a good, power running attack and throwing the ball. They've got dangerous receivers.

"So it looks to me as an outsider looking in that last game plus a bye week to work on things, my guess is they're going on the path they want to go on and they've had great success. I mean, they've had 10 wins a year the last few years.

"You know, I don't think we're expecting a run-and-shoot or an option attack this week. I think the things we've seen them do through the years, I think those are the things we can expect to see them do, certainly, on Saturday."