

# 2014 Big Ten Media Days – Kirk Ferentz transcript, Day One

By Brendan Stiles

*HawkeyeDrive.com*

CHICAGO, Ill. – After speaking with the local media Monday at the 2014 Big Ten Media Days, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz took part in a 30-minute Q&A session with various reporters on hand. I placed my recorder at the table he was at and managed to record the entire duration of the Q&A [while interviewing the Iowa players who are here with Ferentz.](#)

Something to keep in mind: Reporters rotated around table to table, so some questions to Ferentz may have been repeated. All questions are labeled with “Q,” while Ferentz’s responses are labeled with his initials, “KF.”

Below is a transcript of the Q&A in its entirety:

**Q:** When we were here last year, the expectations weren’t real high. Now they are. Talk a little bit about how you handle that as a team.

**KF:** Yeah. Unfortunately, things tend to be really good or really bad in terms of the expectation route and the truth is it’s usually somewhere in the middle. But I’m glad everybody’s feeling a little bit better now and the reality is we know that we still have a lot of work to do. The good news is I think the guys have worked hard since January. We’ve had some ups and downs, but any time we’ve gone down, the guys have really responded in a positive way. So you know, we’re seeing some good things behind the scenes and really eager to hit the field next Monday and just have a chance to really start

working on things instead of talking about them or, you know, other segments. Strength and conditioning and all that stuff, which is so important. But it's going to be fun to really pull the team together and start practicing football.

**Q:** (inaudible) about the strength of the lines on both offense and defense.

**KF:** We have an opportunity. You know, the offensive line, we have four guys who have played before and played pretty well. We still have another opening to fill and then obviously depth. Then on the defensive line, we probably do have four spots where guys have played and played pretty well, so we have to continue to develop depth there, too. But you know, the good news is we've got a bunch of guys that have an opportunity to be pretty good and the real question is how much can they improve between now and the start of the season.

**Q:** What went through your mind when you saw the video of Brandon Scherff hang-cleaning?

**KF:** You know, the good news is he's even better on the field than he is in the weight room and that's what it's all about. But, that's just unusual. I tell you, what he can do in that weight room is highly unusual. He has worked hard. Part of it's genetics, but the other part of it is he works extremely hard and I think that's the thing I admire about Brandon so much. More so than his physical stature, just his attitude and his work ethic and you know, when you talk about that part of the game, he fits in with other guys we've had. You think about Marshal Yanda, Riley [Reiff] and [Bryan] Bulaga recently and then going back to [Robert] Gallery and [Eric] Steinbach. So he has all the attributes of being a tremendous football player and lineman. It's going to be fun to see how much he can grow.

**Q:** When you look at the Big Ten schedule, no Michigan, Ohio State, Penn State or Michigan State, what are your thoughts on

that?

**KF:** Yeah, I remember people bringing that up in '07 and we didn't go to a bowl game that year. My answer to that – the idea of whether you want to call an easy schedule, not tough, whatever term you want to use – you know, that's for people who aren't out competing. You know, I think anybody who knows anything about competition. We had a pretty good football team and ended up seventh in the country in '09 and it took a miracle for us to beat Northern Iowa in our first ball game. So that's the reality of it and shortly thereafter, I remember Butler played in the national championship, I think against Duke. They had lost to Youngstown State about five weeks before that on the basketball court. So you know, any time people line up and compete in college athletics, you better be ready to go. I don't know as much about the 12 teams we play, but I know with our team right now, we've got a lot of work to do. We need to have the proper respect for winning and what it takes to be good as a football team. I hope our team will show that they do have that respect.

**Q:** What are your concerns about the linebackers?

**KF:** Inexperience. But I think Quinton Alston would illustrate that picture as much as anybody. I think he's really ready to go. He has practiced really well the last two springs now. Last year, he did a great job. I just watch him continue to grow, mature. He has really taken a leadership role, which is awfully tough to do when you haven't played a lot. But you know, I think all he needs is an opportunity. He's a guy who got stuck behind a really good player. We had three NFL players playing there last year. I think we have good players behind him and it may take them a little while to get them full speed and acclimated to the competition. But that's like any new player. But I think we've got guys. We have to stay healthy and then we've got to continue to develop. I really like the group of guys we have. But that being said, the guys up front are going to have to lead because they have played

and they have experience.

**Q:** Talk about Jake Rudock's progression. What do you see from him moving forward?

**KF:** You know, I talked about Scherff and Quinton, and Jake's the same way. He thinks right. He always has. He works hard, learns from his mistakes. The good thing is he has got 13 games now where he has made mistakes and done good things as well. So I think he's a lot more confident than he was, but he's also very acutely aware of what he can do to get better and it's a lot easier when you've done it once and gone through it. You know, we saw it in the spring. He is, I think, a totally different player and you know, hopefully he'll just continue to improve and go. It's comforting for all of us to know that we've got two guys who have played at that position.

**Q:** You spoke about using two quarterbacks. Are you still entertaining that thought?

**KF:** We will and we'll see how things go during camp and see what it looks like. But you know, we've got a lot of confidence in C.J. [Beathard] too and if we can find a role for him and it will help us win and make us a better offensive football team, we're certainly open to that. This is a nice three-week period where we can play around a little bit with that and just see what it looks like.

**Q:** How have you been able to cultivate your team's identity? In an age of spread, you're still kind of old school.

**KF:** You know, it's kind of interesting. If you look at the three Big Ten championship games that have been won, the three winners, I guess you could say the same thing about them. So sometimes old school is a good school. You know, our country was built on some old school thoughts and we've still got a lot of good things about our country. So to me, it's all about what's best for your team and your personnel. You know, we've been accused of being stubborn, hard-headed, I don't know. But

to me, it's all about figuring out what's best for your players, what you can coach the best and then doing it to the best of your ability. Teams that do that tend to win more than lose. There's all kinds of ways to be successful, that has been proven. Auburn ran a whole different attack than whomever and Florida State's another style and Oregon, etc. So you look around nationally, there's no one way to do things. It's all about doing things as best as you can.

**Q:** Being from Pennsylvania, do you have an opinion on Penn State and the current team maybe getting a bowl back? Would that be something you'd be in favor of?

**KF:** You know, without getting into too much detail, I just think... you know, I'm not on the front lines, I don't know a whole much of anything. I'm just a guy driving by. But what I do know, it just seemed to me like the players on those last two ball clubs and the coaches really paid a hard price for maybe something ... I'm not sure. I think the intent was good. I'm just not sure they hit the mark on it. I think about Bill O'Brien, the job that he did. I think about how those kids just worked hard and persevered. The first guy I'm thinking about is Michael Mauti. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing his name right, but I know who he is. Just watching that guy play and the passion he had. You know, a lot of good things came out of that, too. Was it fair? I just think maybe we missed our mark on that. I say we, I mean, whoever doled out the punishment. I'm not sure it hit the right target, I guess. I hate to see kids penalized for something they weren't involved in.

**Q:** How do you regroup from losses of players either due to graduation or to injury?

**KF:** You know, it happens every year. That's the one thing about college football or high-school football. If you coach, it's always bittersweet because your seniors graduate every year. So Senior Day is a tough thing and then after the bowl

game, it's always tough to say goodbye. But if you coach in high school and college, that's how it is, and the pros really have mimicked us in some ways now with free agency. That's part of life. You lose good players every year, but it also opens up the door of opportunity for other guys. It's the same thing with injuries. When a player goes down, unfortunately that's the nature of our sport, but it gives an opportunity for somebody else to step in and be a great story. So you know, out of everything bad, something good can happen. The only thing that's hard I think is when a senior gets hurt with a career-ending injury or season-ending injury. That's really a tug on you emotionally and injuries are a part of our game, but you hate to see someone's last year be ended prematurely. That's probably the worst thing that can happen.

**Q:** What does the Big Ten mean to you as a coach and how does it help you recruit?

**KF:** It means an awful lot. It's my 25th year coming up in the conference and a lot of that is by choice, fortunately. I really believe in our conference. I think it stands for everything that's good in college football and college athletics. We've got a great set of schools here. We've got a great fan base. I think the competition is outstanding and the emphasis on academics, outside of the Ivy Leagues, I think it's second to none and you know, I'm sure people could argue that. But I just think we've got a great conference, a great product and we could be extremely proud of it and if I didn't feel that way, I probably would've left a long time ago.

**Q:** How about Drew Ott and his development?

**KF:** Drew's a great story. You know, Drew was a skinny kid two years ago and probably the most illustrated thing I could tell you about Drew Ott, he requested last spring to work at the right defensive end spot because he wanted to run at Scherff all day long and he did that. He ran hard at him and Scherff had to work his tail off to compete with Drew. Drew has just

got a great spirit and that little moped ride he had a couple of years ago is probably revealing, too. He's just a different guy, but I tell you, he's all about his team. He works extremely hard, he's very, very competitive, and if you're not careful, you might underestimate him. He's a really good player.

**Q:** Would you like Drew to get a little more push on the edge?

**KF:** Well, we've done pretty well in the run game. We haven't really been a big, huge pass rush team, even with guys like [Matt] Roth and Derrick Robinson. We've had some NFL players at that position. [Aaron] Kampman, I think led the league in sacks in 2000, 2001 or something like that. 2001, I guess it would have been. But that's just kind of how we're built and we'll get our pass rush other ways. But yeah, I'd love it if they could stop the run and sack the guy every time. That'd be great, and really in this day and age, it's more about disruption than it is sacks because I think that's a really... don't get me wrong, I mean, if you give up a lot of sacks, that's a bad stat. But it's really more about disrupting the quarterback than it is sacking him because it's really getting tough to do with the spread and throwing the ball in two seconds, all of that stuff that you see.

**Q:** When did you get a sense that [Scherff] would be as freakish as he is?

**KF:** You know, it has been interesting. Both he and Carl mirror each other a lot. They're both two of the bigger freshmen we've ever had come to campus. We typically grow our guys. Colin Cole came big. He was 285-290 when he came, still playing. But those guys came in big. We toyed with playing them as true freshmen. I'm glad that we didn't because it has given them a chance to mature and really do things, you know, grow the right way, I think. The only thing that's kind of interesting is both of them have faced some significant injury issues. It'd be scary to think where both of them would be at

right now. But I think Brandon has such a great attitude. He's so humble, so modest and he realizes there's always work to be done and he comes with that attitude. So you know, it's just... that's what great players possess. That's the attitude they possess and he has got that. It's not like we got to teach him on that one. That started at home.

**Q:** He was a high school quarterback?

**KF:** Yeah, in 10th grade. I still want to see those films. He claimed he threw for 1,600 yards. I'm not buying it. I've got to see that.

**Q:** How close was Scherff to leaving early for the NFL?

**KF:** Well you know, that was all up to him and I don't tell guys hearing that. We just try to present the facts to them and what the upside, downside is. My big point to him was, you know, when he's 27, he's going to be sitting in a pretty good place anyway and you know, I said the nice thing about being where he's at right now, you know, when you get ahead a little bit, you can do things you want to do instead of doing things you have to do. I think he's going to have every opportunity to have a great pro career and he will. I think he also has enlarged his opportunity to have a great college career and he has already had a pretty good one. But if things go the way I would hope they would, he could walk out of Iowa being one of the all-time great players in Iowa history and that's a pretty neat thing, that he has that opportunity. But he has got to go out and do it.

**Q:** I would imagine the talks with scouts and GMs, they were pretty positive.

**KF:** Oh yeah. I mean, he would've been a first rounder, just like Bulaga, just like Reiff. That's a no-brainer in my mind. So he couldn't lose. Whatever decision he made, he couldn't lose. There was no downside and he did what he felt he wanted to do and college football is a pretty fun thing. I know

there's a lot of talk about it now, but a lot of people really enjoy playing college football and I think Brandon would be one of the first guys to tell you that.

**Q:** (inaudible) about Iowa practicing inside-outside zone.

**KF:** We only have two plays, so if they can't learn those two plays, there's no hope for them. It's simple. There are a lot of details that go into everything obviously and that's the trick and then you know, what happens across the line from you has a multitude of possibilities. So I think that's... if you're going to be good at anything, you better work it hard. That's kind of our philosophy.

**Q:** Do you guys feel like you're making strides moving the ball through the air?

**KF:** We had no passing game two years ago. I mean, I'm stating a fact and I think you guys caught onto that. It was a perfect storm and it certainly was not James Vandenberg's fault. James is still a pretty good player and would've thrown well last year. So sometimes you go through the ups and downs. But I think we're certainly more experienced now. We're more capable, we've got better opportunities to threaten defenses, I think, in a variety of ways and that's always a healthy thing. The thing we do believe in is balance and it's just hard to win without it. So the more of that you have, the more potential for that you have, the better off you're going to be. Right now, it at least looks like we have that.

**Q:** You talked about playing C.J. in the spring. Has that conversation loomed?

**KF:** Yeah, we had that in June and I don't know if we'll take all three weeks of camp, but we'll fool around and do some things. You know, we're not trying to placate him into a piece. We're trying to win and if we think it can be effective for us, then certainly we'll try to weave it in in a smart way. You know, the first thing I think about is Brad Banks

when we used him in '01. That might be the way we do it, but there might be some 'Oh, my gosh!' moments there. I remember Brad stepping out of bounds against Michigan in '01 and everybody in the crowd going 'ugh!' So you know, it's just one of those deals. But we're open to everything right now and over the next three weeks, once we get started here, everything will crystallize a little bit.

**Q:** How do Jake and C.J. differentiate themselves?

**KF:** There's a little bit of difference there. You know, they're unique in their own ways. But the good news is I think they're both good quarterbacks.

**Q:** Where do you stand at linebacker right now?

**KF:** We're thin. I mean, the biggest question and I answered it earlier, my biggest concern is our experience level. It's not our personnel. I like our guys. They're good guys and Quinton Alston is a great example. He has worked as hard as anybody. Three springs ago, I wasn't sure if he liked football. Two springs ago, boy he just came alive and that's college football and since then, he has been doing a great job. When I look at him, he was a great player a year ago. He just got stuck behind three great players. The big thing is getting them game experience. Just like our quarterback last year, it's going to take them a while. But I think they'll play well and be aggressive. Fortunately, it's not as... I'm not diminishing the challenge of playing linebacker, but there's nothing more challenging than being a quarterback. So you know, those guys will do fine. We can't get hurt though. We've got to keep guys healthy.

**Q:** Does anything Brandon does surprise you anymore?

**KF:** No, not really. Obviously, there are some genes involved there, too. That's part of the deal. But I think again, it's just a reflection of his work ethic. He's not a guy who coasts. He has no idea what that means. If he's doing

something that he's serious about, then it's full speed, full effort and typically with a smile on his face, too, which makes it fun to coach guys like that. That's how Yanda was. You go down and that's how great players typically. Shonn Greene didn't always have a smile on his face, but that's just the way he was. He wasn't meaning anything by it. Bob didn't either, Bob Sanders.

**Q:** What was the importance of that Nebraska win?

**KF:** They're all important.

**Q:** But the way that it went down and culminating the season...

**KF:** You know, I think that the turning point at that stage was the halftime at Michigan because we could have packed up and gone home. We were down 21-7 at halftime, it wasn't looking great. It probably illustrates what was great about last year and what the challenge is this year. There was nothing that we said at halftime. There was nothing that we did. It was just our leadership base, I should say. The players, to me, just decided, 'Hey, we're not going to let this get away. We'll find a way to win this game,' and the players went out and did it in the second half and you know, it just carried into that next week as well. So that's the value of great leadership. You never know when that moment's going to be or when it's going to show up. You know, there were points earlier in the season where we didn't have that. We weren't there. So you know, they're all important. Every step's important and just because you get it one week doesn't mean you're going to get it the next week, either. So it's a moving target and a complex equation.

**Q:** Are those some of your more gratifying moments as a coach?

**KF:** Absolutely. I'll go back to '01 against Indiana and we did everything but give [Antwaan] Randle El an escort to the end zone. It was like we were afraid of the guy, afraid to compete with him and then you know, finally in that second half, we

just kind of dug in a little bit and did something about it. So you have a lot of moments during the years that really kind of stand out and that was one, too, where if we had lost that game, I don't know where that thing was going. But at some point, you just got to make up your mind that, 'We're going to get this done,' and I wasn't sure that we were going to. The guy had about eight million yards against us in three years.

**Q:** Bob [Sanders] had about 25 tackles in that game.

**KF:** Yeah. He helped lead the charge. They had one, we had one. That could have gone either way.

**Q:** There's a lot of buzz about Brandon and you've had this with other offensive linemen at Iowa. Did you have to have this conversation with him?

**KF:** Yes and no. I mean, how often is the offensive tackle the offensive MVP of the team? I don't know what that says. It says we're in Iowa, I guess. But in his case, it wasn't a surprise just because of the impact that he has on our football team. You try to warn him about what the pitfalls are, but he is so grounded and he was raised that way. It started at home. So it's not like there's a lot of massaging going on there. He's as humble as they come. He's as pure as they come. But all that being said, I had an interesting conversation with Yanda this past June and he said he caught himself paying attention to some of the noise after the Super Bowl championship and he had to remind himself, 'Hey, just block it all out and do what you do.' So yeah, everybody's human. He's going to get a lot of attention. He should get a lot of attention. But my guess is he'll handle it well because the thing he worries about is the image he conveys to his teammates, the message he sends to them. He's acutely aware of that. He gets that and I don't think you're going to see him get off the track.

**Q:** You've had some great ones. Is he going to be right up

there?

**KF:** He has got a chance to be outstanding. Yeah. He could be one of the best players ever I think at Iowa. But you know, it's all in the cards. It's like everything, it has got to happen. He has done everything he can to position himself and I said this in the other room, the thing I'm the most excited about is that there are other things he can get better at and he knows that. He has played at a pretty high level, but he can get better. That's exciting. That's fun.

**Q:** He moves a lot of weight around.

**KF:** He can move weight. He has got that part down pretty good.

**Q:** What do you think of what Bo Pelini suggested about allowing recruits to sign the moment they come to an agreement with a team?

**KF:** You know, I know we have 14 year olds driving in Iowa, but you shouldn't be able to get a driver's license until you're 16. I think there need to be some parameters. That's just my personal opinion. I would sure like to see things opened up and the only response I've heard against early signing is it might expedite the process of recruiting and the pace of it. OK... like is anybody watching what's going on in the world? It's such a joke. It's laughable that anybody would say that and they should be embarrassed, quite frankly, if anybody uses that as a line. To me, I think at some point, we need to come to grips with what is going on in reality and address that. I'm not saying this is the way it ought to be, but I think open up discussion to the fact that there ought to be a way to accommodate official visits in June. I'd like to see parents, at least one parent, be allowed to be included in that process because people are traveling around. They're traveling around right now on their own nickel in June and in July, and open it up a little bit. We can act like things aren't going on, but they are going on. We could put our head in the sand and say

it's going to go away. It's not going away. If anything, it's going to accelerate. So I think there needs to be a lot of discussion on all that stuff.

**Q:** Bo thinks if you do this, it's going to slow down offering.

**KF:** Yeah. You know, it gets down to, again, 'Are we holding hands or are we getting married?' There's a lot of people right now ... I've heard there's a new term out there, non-committable offer. It sounds like we're buying cars or something here. What does that mean? Explain that to me. We're friendship engaged? It's like, I don't know what all this means. If you offer somebody, you offer them. If you don't, you don't. Anyway. It's one more area that needs some attention and needs to be addressed.

**Q:** The Big Ten West, is it kind of like the NFC North?

**KF:** Yeah, that's an interesting thought. Somebody asked a question earlier. Packers, I guess. We've got some guys on the Packers. We've got Detroit, too. We've got Green Bay and the Vikings. Somebody asked the question earlier about the Neanderthal approach. But it's interesting. The blue-bloods haven't won the championship game yet and the three teams that have won the championship have all looked like Neanderthal football. At least that's what people want to call it. To me, it's good football. I mean, they don't turn it over, they run it, they pass it and score enough points to win and play defense. It's what the game has always been about. You know, for all the rhetoric and all that stuff, it's amazing there has only been three championship teams so far. It's about doing whatever you do well. It's not that other styles won't work as they will.