

Vrbo Citrus Bowl: Iowa vs Kentucky

Saturday, January 1, 2022

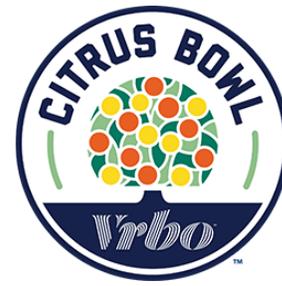
Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Kirk Ferentz

Press Conference



Kentucky 20, Iowa 17

KIRK FERENTZ: So, you know, heck of a football game. We knew coming in, it was going to be a tough, physical, competitive game. Kentucky has a good team, veteran team and very physical team, so congratulations to them, Coach Stoops and everybody involved with their program.

Just really proud of our guys. They fought right to the end. We didn't play well enough to win and left some things out there certainly, but that is in part credit to Kentucky and just something we have to work through here.

I thought the guys came back and really played a great second half, and we came up short. So again, very, very proud of our guys. I have been saying all season long, this is a very special football team. It has been really an honor to work with these guys. This is the last game for this football team. It has been an honor to work with them -- I think speaking on behalf of our entire staff that way.

What I just got done telling those guys, fought to the end, to the last whistle and expected it to go down to the end. Can be really proud, to have a 10-win season -- is special, and just have done a great, great job.

Again, really proud of our guys. Sorry to come up short today, but just really proud and especially of the seniors. It was a great senior class, and certainly appreciate all their efforts, all they have done, not only this season, but over the course of their careers. So, wish them all the best moving forward. I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Right down to the wire, even though you didn't win the game today, what do you feel like was the high point of your team, what did they do the best and what encourages you most going into next season?

KIRK FERENTZ: We left opportunities out there, especially in the first half. It is a little bit disappointing. It is

not a new story, but in football, those little things really add up to make a difference, and that is really kind of how it shook out.

Our guys were good at halftime. I think they realized we could do things better. I thought we did things better for the most part in the second half. Credit to Kentucky. They got the stop when they needed to, and then they converted those plays on that last possession, and we came up short.

It is just a tough day for our guys, but just proud of this football team, this 2021 version.

Q. One of the bright spots was the rushing game today. What in your eyes did you see went right about that, especially when you were already without Tyler Goodson?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think, as I have indicated for a while, we really have felt good about our depth chart. Getting Ivory [Kelly-Martin] back was a bonus. We weren't counting on that a month ago or even two weeks ago, so that was a bonus for us.

We have been impressed with Gavin [Williams] and Leshon [Williams]. Gavin has played some. Thought, he did a great job today. Ran hard and ran tough. Leshon, really proud of him. I thought he stepped up and played really well. So happy about that.

It is tough for Ivory. Wish we had him back for another year. We all wish he was part of our team, but I can't say enough about what he's done on and off the field. He is a tremendous young person. Like all our seniors, wish him the best.

I would add, I feel like our line has matured as we have gone along. Not there yet, but that showed a little bit today, too, against a big front there, missing a guy. They have got some big, physical guys, and I thought we showed growth again today, so that is encouraging.

Q. You just alluded to the offensive line, and I'm assuming that's part of the answer you'll give to this, but what do you want to see from the offense in the



future that you didn't have this year and like today in a 17-point game?

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, obviously we have to score more points, and we are well aware of that. You know, that's part of the next couple months here, this coming month, or this month, I should say, present month, be focused mostly on recruiting.

Our guys get back at the end of the month, and we'll start working towards next year. Once, we get off the road from recruiting, that is when we get introspective and study things we are doing and look at things we need to do.

I felt like we have been gaining ground, and the line is a good reference point there. I think we have been gaining ground. We are going to lose some good players, but we have to keep moving other guys forward just like you do each and every year.

I don't think there are any magic answers right now. Just a couple conversions here and there, that type of thing, and it's a really fine line. We have got to keep pushing.

Q. A couple questions on the fourth and inches decision there at the end. Can you walk me through your thought process? Obviously first down, you can run out most of the clock.

KIRK FERENTZ: Pretty simple for me. Felt like, I liked our odds. Perfect world, you like to get the ball inside the 20, but even with the ball, they had 80 yards. I don't know if they had a time-out -- they didn't at that point.

I liked our odds, and we played those odds. Retrospect, a lot of things you do it over, but I felt comfortable with where we're at. Obviously, we would rather have converted on third down.

Q. Was not having Tyler Linderbaum on the field maybe a part that --

KIRK FERENTZ: No, not at all. Not at all.

Q. Was there an option to fake that? Looked like you had a weird formation off the punt.

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, we were just trying to drum up -- that is all we were trying to do. On the earlier fourth down, we thought they were off-sides. At least to our thought, the guy had hit his helmet before the ball gets snapped, so just taking a shot at that.

Q. Wanted to ask about Keagan Johnson; didn't seem to be in uniform, but he was down here. Was there a

reason why he didn't play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I thought we released that information. Apparently, we didn't or didn't get out. Trainers got a call about 3:30 in the morning, and I have not heard a report what it is. Could be kidney stones. Might be an appendix, but he had a tough early morning, if you will, and as far as I know, he is doing fine, but have not heard a final diagnosis.

So tremendous young guy. Just unfortunate he couldn't be here for his first Bowl.

Q. Can you talk about the defense, how they adjusted early on? Kentucky went right down the field against you guys, and they seemed to figure things out.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, just seems sometimes it takes us a little while to get settled in and get a feel of the game and what have you, and it certainly felt that way in that first possession. Defensive guys do a great job. There is good communication, players and coaches, and I think one thing about having some continuity in our system. At least, we know where to tinker when you have to tinker.

I thought we made some good adjustments, and made some good red zone stops. I think twice in that first half, which kept us in the game. Then the other thing in that first half, we had that red zone opportunity and couldn't come up with a touchdown. Those kinds of things really weigh into what goes on, but the guys came back the second half and just kept playing. Gave ourselves a chance.

Q. Can you explain the emotions of the roller coaster that was the final seven, ten minutes of that game for you and your team?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, seems to be we get in a lot of games like this where it just goes right down to the last 15 minutes, five minutes, whatever, and it's one more of those. You just try to stay focused on what is going on and what is in front of you, and you know, again, perfect world, we convert the first down when we ended up punting the thing and you'd like to think you get the stop.

You have to give Kentucky a lot of credit, too. They put us in that fourth and less than one, and they took the ball and were able to drive it and came up with some big plays. No. 1 [Wan'Dale Robinson] is part of it. He is a really good player. The quarterback is a really good player and a lot of respect for him, and their whole team. It is a good program.

It is hard. It is hard. The ups and downs are challenging.

Q. Speaking about Wan'Dale Robinson, how difficult is



it to defend him even though you know they don't have a lot of other receivers they are going to get the ball to; he gets so many of their targets?

KIRK FERENTZ: He is just a really explosive, dynamic football player. He's tough to keep up with. The interference play, I think it was in the fourth quarter, too, I think, wasn't it? We were trying to get hands on him, and that is not easy. He ended up having a crack there in the back end.

He's a really good football player. He was good when we faced him last time, and he is probably better right now and that comes with age. We have a lot of respect for him.

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