

Outback Bowl: Mississippi State vs Iowa

Saturday, December 29, 2018

Kirk Ferentz

Joe Moorhead

Press Conference

MIKE SCHULZE: Thank you all for being here today. On behalf of the Outback Bowl, we'd like to welcome you to the 33rd Outback Bowl. This is the 33rd game. The game day forecast is mostly sunny, high of 80 degrees, and I think about 76 degrees at kickoff, so we're very, very excited about that.

The Outback Bowl, we're very, very proud of what this Bowl game has done for college football and the Tampa Bay region. We have paid out \$148 million over our history of the past 32 games. This has generated a \$1 Billion economic impact for the Tampa Bay region, tens of millions of dollars every year in exposure for the area. We've also recently in the last few years developed a charitable initiative which has generated over \$500,000 the past two years and we'll be adding to that number significantly this year, as well, for local charities.

It really is a Tampa Bay treasure, and we're very, very proud of what the Bowl game means to the region and community and to college football and the universities.

Of course, you can't do that without great relationships. We have the longest title sponsor in College Bowl Game history with Outback Steakhouse now in their 24th year.

We have relationships with the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference that are over two decades old, as well, and as part of that, that affords us the ability to have quality universities in this game year in and year out, and this year is no exception.

We have two just unbelievably great programs in this game, two really good teams, not only on the field but just quality programs from top to bottom with first class administrations and certainly first class coaches, as well as probably two of the best coaches in the business, so we welcome them both today.

Coach Ferentz and Coach Moorhead, we're going to ask each of you to give a statement and recap where you are with your Bowl week preparation, and then we're going to open it up to questions and answers for a little bit from the members of the media.



As the Big Ten representative who is home team this year, Iowa is the home team, we'll allow Coach Ferentz to go first, and then we'll ask Coach Moorhead to follow with a statement and we'll open it up.

Thank you both for being here.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: First of all it's been a great couple days for our players already, and we're basically just in the middle of things right now. The guys still have a few more things to really enjoy and have fun with over the next couple days, so that part's been great. I think we're doing well in the practice field.

Preparation is going fairly smoothly and we're about, hopefully where we want to be. Hopefully we can finish out the week here and be ready to go at kickoff.

And then you know, the other thing, came here in 2003 or post 2003 season for the 2004 Outback Bowl. It's my sixth trip back. We've experienced good and bad on the field, but the one thing that's been really consistent is just how outstanding the experience is for our players, our coaches, all the families that are here, everybody that's in the Bowl party. I tell our players all the time: Bowls, it's something that's very special and it's something that's earned. Nobody gives you an opportunity to go play in a Bowl game, and every Bowl that we participate in has been extremely significant and for the most part been first class, and this one is right at the top. That has been consistent going back to 2003.

We're excited to be here. Excited to close out the week and looking forward to a really tough challenge on Tuesday playing a great Mississippi State team.

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Certainly, very appreciative of the Outback Bowl leadership for selecting us to play in this prestigious game. Have been a part of a number of high level Bowl games and I think this is second to none, from the opportunities our kids have had to go to Tampa Bay Lightning game, did some bowling, did a hospital visit, going to Busch Gardens today, beach day. It's been unbelievable, not just for the coaches, but the families and entire travel party and the way the schedule is set up, with us being able to take care of business and meetings with practice in the

morning and moving on to enjoy ourselves in the night, we're certainly all appreciative of that.

We've had an unbelievable week thus far and look to continue to do so. Practice has gone well. Not necessarily sure we were expecting nice weather, but not necessarily temperatures reaching the 80s. Going on practice 14 and I think what you have to fight is repping the same plays, and making sure the kids are locked in and focused.

And with the opportunity to compete against a great team from the Big Ten like Iowa under Coach Ferentz's leadership, they have been the model and blueprint for success for a long time, and I understand it's going a physical game against a blue collar, fundamentally sound football team and I think it's going to be one that's exciting for the fans and one that we're certainly proud to play in.

Q. For both of you, Coach Ferentz first. You want to go to the College Football Playoffs, Plan A, but Plan B, coming to the Outback Bowl in Tampa and knowing you're going to play a higher echelon SEC team

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It's like the NFL, two people are going to play in the Super Bowl out of 32 teams. Obviously more people play Division I football, but four teams are going to be in the Playoffs.

There's a lot of good football teams that have been playing and will continue to play, and I think that's certainly the case in this game, and I'll go back, just again, our first experience here was fantastic.

After the 2003 experience, you know, I can just tell from your experience, it's a great Bowl game on every level, and the biggest thing is you know you're going to play a tough, aggressive football team on game day, and that's certainly the case again this year.

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: As a first year head coach in the SEC, our goals are to win the SEC and compete for a National Championship, and we weren't College Football Playoffs and weren't able to reach that Bowl, but this is not a Plan B Bowl. This is a Plan A Bowl. We sat down and looked at the opportunities and opponents and things available for our kids as a reward for achieving an 8 4 record in arguably the toughest conference division in all of college football, this one was at the top of list

And once again, to be able to play a great team like Iowa with this setting and Bowl structure, our kids couldn't have asked for anything better.

Q. Coach Moorhead, how much carryover is there

from your Penn State offense to the offense you run now, and how much help is it that you faced Iowa a couple times in the last several years?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think there's a significant amount of carryover. A lot of things are based on your personnel. We want to be philosophically our belief is that you want to have your scheme match your personnel, not your personnel match your scheme.

So there's some things we've done at Penn State and other places I've been that maybe not necessarily fit because of who we have. But I would say the base foundation and structure of it was the same and you know, I'd say there's relative familiarity, having gone against Iowa in 2016 and 2017 just on the offensive side of the ball.

But like anything, coaches tweak and change and make adjustments, and with a great staff, we're certainly expecting a challenge like we saw the last two years we played them.

Q. Penn State is one of the most innovative offensive teams in the last 20 years. Especially 2016, but also 2017, how does that adjust what you want to do defensively and incorporate more of the 4 2 5 package?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Well, we didn't play defense in 2016. Throw that one out of the window. That could have been a thousand yards instead of whatever it was.

But we made a better showing, certainly the next time out. We competed a lot better.

There's some similarities obviously and some differences, too and probably the biggest similarity is they both in my mind, the quarterback was the catalyst. I think that's really obvious. You look at Mississippi State, you look at the amount of carries he's had relative to anybody in the conference not just quarterbacks, you know, he is where everything starts with their offensive football team.

I felt the same way about Penn State. That quarterback is a tremendous player. Now, they look different but both of them are leaders, they are winners and you know, so that to me is where it all kind of starts, and if you don't have an answer, somewhat of an answer, you're going to be in trouble there.

Q. You're capping off your 20th season at Iowa. If you could talk about some of the challenges you faced as a head coach in 1999 versus some of the challenges of 2018, what's changed?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: First thing I tell guys that are

younger head coaches, although Joe has been a head coach before, the bad news is it doesn't get any better or easier as you go along. You'd think it would. Maybe if I was a little better organized, it would.

I think it's kind of like distractions for players. That's not a new thing. That goes back in history of mankind, right. There's always challenges and distractions for players. May be different now with social media, but I think that's a big part of it is just figure out what is going to take people off their course.

College athletes, I think there are three main goals: You want them to get their degree; have a great experience playing the highest level of football they can; and develop as people so they are ready to go into it the adult world whenever that time comes.

So I don't think the goals have ever changed but obviously the challenges, the distractions that are out there for every athlete, that has changed. Try to deal with it.

And I think the other thing is you try to listen to people, watch and listen, and you learn every day if you're paying attention, from your players and obviously other people, as well.

Q. As western Pennsylvania guys, it's mano a mano physical, how much have you brought that to Iowa and Mississippi State?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's one of the funniest things about this game. What are the odds of two guys from Iowa and Mississippi, we probably grew up 15 miles from each other.

In Pittsburgh, we were joking about this earlier. Pittsburgh, if you live on one side of the river, you might as well be in another state, or country, for that matter. Pittsburgh, I know I certainly was growing up, Penn Hills might as well have been in New York, upstate New York.

But yeah, I think all of us are products of our environment, certainly, and how we're raised and who impacts you and influences you. And it so happens that my high school coach ended up being the guy I worked for at the University of Pittsburgh in 1980. We have that commonality, too, University of Pittsburgh. He did a lot to shape my thoughts and beliefs, as did Coach Fry.

Everybody you work with, and a lot of times head coaches get mentioned, but some of the assistants you work with influence you an awful lot, too. Again, you learn from everybody.

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, I think western

Pennsylvania prides itself in certainly being a blue collar, roll up your sleeves, go to work, shut your mouth and let the production speak for itself, type of town. I think any football program, that resonates because that's what you want to see in your players.

And certainly growing up, my dad worked in the mill for 35 years and worked a bunch of jobs and sent three kids to college. I think a lot of lessons that I've learned not just from growing up in the City of Pittsburgh, but playing high school football there for a bunch of great coaches, against a bunch of great players, those are lessons that you carry on through life on and off the field.

Q. Regarding Amani Hooker and what he's been able to do for you this year in a hybrid role, how instrumental is he in helping your defense?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's kind of a two part. He's done a very nice job playing, basically, nickel or a field backer type of position, offer whatever you want to call it. I'm not even sure what we call it, quite frankly, Mani or something.

Basically he's our outsider linebacker to the field, but the other component to that is the fact that Geno Stone has done a good job back at safety which afforded us that opportunity to play with a little different personnel.

To me, the biggest story there is just the way Geno has emerged. We were counting on Amani to play really well this year. He did a good job a year ago, made his mistakes as a first year player but we were confident he would be one of our better players and leaders on the defense, which he is.

But Geno, to watch him come along and develop like he has and both of them are kind of similar in that they are both non recruited, kind of wonder why on both those guys, but they really fit the mold of what we're looking for in defensive football players.

Q. You had two players, at least two players projected first rounders but decided to play in the game. What kind of conversations did you have there? And as an offensive coach, you have a terrific defense. How has that come about?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: The first part, the conversations were really limited in scope and ultimately, I want our players who are in that position to make the best decision for themselves in the short term or in the long term and if your guy is projected kind of like the discussions Coach Franklin had with Saquon Barkley, you can make a decision like Jeffrey entered the Draft early or not playing in a game or playing in a game, you have to make a decision that's best for you personally.

And certainly for the guys coming back and decide they want to play in their last game, I think it's a testament to their commitment to the program, but more importantly to their teammates. We have a team that's incredibly close, great chemistry and more than anything, I think they want to finish this out for each other.

The second part, the defensive part, yeah, I like giving up 12 points a game and lead the country scoring defense. Means you have to score less. Wish we had done that a couple times this year, but certainly Coach Shoop is a guy I've known for a long time, another western Pennsylvania guy, grew up in Oakmont.

But for what our defense and our defensive staff has done this year against a very rigorous and explosive offensive schedule, you know, I think it speaks volumes about the game plan, what the coaches have done to put our kids in position to be successful, and most importantly what they have done to execute that play.

Q. Having been a high level coach in the Big Ten and now in the SEC as a head coach, compare and contrast, what's that league like and what's this league like?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: They are more similar than dissimilar, I know that's for certain. You can split hairs and compare Bowl records or compare like opponents and things like that. I think when you get in what's called the transit when you start, this team beat this team, you can make the argument for just about anything.

I think the consistent thing that you see is on a weekly basis in both leagues, you know, there are very few off weeks where you can take a breath and gather yourself. It's literally out of the pan and into the fire. You play a team in the western part of the conference or cross over to the east or the west, the margin of error is negligible. You have to be on top of it every single week on the field and in recruiting.

That's the biggest thing I learned as a first year head coach in this conference. There are no off days in terms of preparation, competition during the season, it's certainly on the recruiting trail as well.

Q. You mentioned recruiting, it feels like it's always more competitive in the SEC than the Big Ten recruiting wise. Is that probably a myth?

DWAYNE HASKINS: I mean, at Penn State in the Big Ten, you're evaluating, identifying and attempting to recruit the best of the best in the country, so I don't think that part of it's different. You know, for me, it's hard to compare just because I didn't sit in this seat as an assistant, I was responsible for my area and my

position, so I really didn't have to deal with it in a larger scope.

But certainly now in this season, you get a dose of reality and a quick understanding of what you need to do to be successful and that's attract great players.

Q. Watching film, who does Iowa remind you of, and who does Mississippi State remind you of?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: To compartmentalize a little bit, offense, would be similar to an LSU type with some traditional 21 and 12 personnel groupings, physical offensive line. Quarterback can beat you with his arm. Obviously an excellent tight end and some game breaking receivers. So certainly being able to defend the run, you know, the quick gain, the quarterback movement stuff.

Then defensively, we were discussing that as an offensive staff. I don't know if there's one that really sticks out. We see a bunch of three down in the conference, four down, but certainly from a production standpoint, you know, giving up 17 points a game, just over a hundred rushing, I don't even know if it's 300 total yards, Iowa's defensive production stacks up with anybody in the country.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Kind of similar, with Penn State, the connection there, the players are similar, that type of thing, the scheme is somewhat similar and it's the same way on defense. Coach Shoop wasn't there when we played Penn State the last few years, but his imprint was certainly left.

The thing that's so impressive, they have got really good players. Those guys are really well coached and they execute the defense. So it's hard to find them giving up big plays, easy plays, which that's the sign of a good defense when they make you work for everything and these guys certainly do that, run or pass.

Q. I don't know if you were throwing us off yesterday, but Tristan Wirfs was not first team right tackle. Is he good to start?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I want to talk about that a little bit. You guys caused a firestorm there.

We rotate guys around in practice all the time so poor Tristan got a call from his mom two hours after practice, and she's worried the kid is sick or hurt or whatever. Chalk one up for social media on that one.

Yeah, we rotate guys around and that's really common. We weren't playing games. Maybe Tim (Polasek) was, I don't know, but it wasn't under my direction, that's for sure.

Q. Are you guys worried about too much time to prepare at this point?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think that's always a challenge in Bowl games, or any time you have a bye week even. This is obviously a bye week extended only right now bye weeks might be in the middle of the season and now we have 12 games of each other.

It's like any game. It really gets down to what is pertinent and what you think might be applicable and then trying to go from there.

But yeah, you can overanalyze anything. I don't know much about anything else but in coaching, we're all guilty of that sometimes.

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, that's a fear that you run into with all this time, you don't want to suffer paralysis by analysis. You want to do enough to tweak your game plan and do some things that are a little bit different, but at the same time not reinvent the wheel. I know that's at least from an offensive standpoint something that we've been victim to that, you know, boredom is a cardinal sin, and what works, works, and still going to work in the Bowl game.

So I think it's striking a balance of doing enough that is a little bit different of what you're shown on tape, but at the same time sticking to what you've done that's been successful.

Q. How hard is it to balance the reward of coming to a Bowl game and hey, we're playing a football game here, too?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: You know, experience in it certainly helps. Our first Bowl game, 2001 was like a first time experience.

But even in this game, you know, we've got 70 guys on this trip that were not here two years ago. To put that in perspective, last year we played New York and we were only there for like three days. It was almost like an away trip, normal away trip. What I'm saying, 70 guys, the first time experience handling an entire week.

I think our guys get the idea, and we want them to enjoy it. Certainly that's a big part of the reward for the players, but they also have to try to discipline themselves and have some time cut out to keep their focus on the preparation, making sure we are doing what we are doing.

So if we are meeting or practicing, hopefully their focus is on that. Rest of the time hopefully they are enjoying things or relaxing, one of those two things.

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: Yeah, exactly what Coach said. It's about the ability to compartmentalize and the

way the days are structured, you wake up in the morning, have breakfast, position meeting, go to the field, practice, come back as a staff, grade the tape and the players, and coaches move on to the activities and fun. And just want to make sure the fun part doesn't overtake the football part and you're striking that delicate balance between preparation and activity.

Q. Do you expect to go much past T.J. (Hockenson) being a tight end and how much flex having two tight end sets for 40 percent, do you expect that drop a lot?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think common sense, it will probably change a little bit.

One of the objectives offensively is get your best guys on the field, and I don't mean that in a belittling way to Nate, but you know, those are judgments we'll make and decisions we'll make, down and distance, all those things factor into game situations.

But all that being said, we're not afraid to have Nate in there. Nate's done a good job. He's had some injuries, history of injuries but fortunately in the last year he's been healthy. He had a big play in the Bowl game for us last year. We have total faith in him. Certainly a different type player than Noah. You know, just common sense there.

Q. Who would be a third?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Drew Cook would probably be the third guy.

Q. When you first came to this game, your opposing coach thought your kicker was a running back. Do you recall that situation? What did you think?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Memory serves me correctly, I think it was like mid December, pretty sure I was recruiting and probably the only mistake there that he made was saying anything about anybody's personnel on the other team because I don't know what he was doing.

But I know mid December, I certainly wasn't thinking about who we were playing on January 1st. I think it was just an honest mistake and one of those deals.

Q. When you went to the Lightning game, were your kids excited about that and saying fighting legal?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: A couple got to go on the ice and have a little tricycle. Never seen that before. Kind of a little shootout there.

But yeah, we certainly I'm from Pittsburgh. I follow the Penguins and certainly jump on the bandwagon

when they are in the Playoffs or making a Stanley Cup run.

I didn't grow up a huge hockey fan but in terms of entertainment value, you know, 5 2 going into the third, tied up, and I didn't even know they did a 3 on 3 shootout. I'm turning around wondering if it was going to overtime and six guys are on the ice, and within 15 seconds the thing was over.

I don't know if the kids enjoyed it. I'm pretty sure they did, but I certainly did. I thought it was an awesome game.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I'll go back to the Penguins. I'm old enough to know the Hornets, Pittsburgh Hornets. Dates me a little bit. (Laughter) but Penguin fan, too. Our kids had a great time, certainly.

Any big league activity; we don't have a Major League sport in our state, which makes it I think pretty unique and that's probably why college football is so popular in our state. They have had a great time all week.

Q. A lot of the guys yesterday mentioned you giving kind of a history lesson. How important is that to understand when trying to achieve that?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's really significant for anybody to understand their heritage and what the tradition is in a program, that type of thing.

You know, I think winning games is special. It's not easy to do in college football. To Joe's point earlier, our leagues are very competitive and I would think, at least in my experience, it's different than it was in the 80s. There were some weeks off.

Now, if you think you have one, you're probably going to find some real undesirable results at the end of the week. I think that's significant.

Certainly to win nine or to win ten or anything above eight is certainly kind of a landmark deal, so that's a big thing.

Q. How do you think the atmosphere will play into this game? Iowa's fans travel well and how do you think Mississippi State will travel and influence the atmosphere of the game?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I haven't played at Kinnick. I've been fortunate in my time as an FBS coach to compete in a bunch of the best stadiums in the country and I don't know if there was ever an atmosphere ever, on the last drive we had on that 2 minute drill; we didn't have to use silent cadence very much in my two years at Penn State, but you couldn't hear a thing and I know it's an incredibly passionate and proud fan base.

Don't want to speak for Iowa, but I'm anticipating that they are going to travel well like they have historically and I think the same could be said for Mississippi State's fan base and the cowbells. I was indoctrinated into that this year. I see a lot of similarities between the two schools in a lot of different levels, and certainly the passion and the commitment and belief of the fan base is something I think will resonate on game day.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We did round up all the cowbells (Laughter) keep them off the street and what have you. That will be an experience for us.

I think again, talking about the Big Ten, SEC, you're talking about great fan bases and enthusiasm and should be a great environment and typically whoever is playing the best will get the advantage from the fan base.

Q. In 20 years as a head coach, any thoughts in do you take time to think about that every now and then?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Every now and then. I'm not getting ready to retire, so I'm not going to get real reflective other than just say, I feel very, very fortunate, I've never had a bad job, going back to teaching at Worcester Academy right out of college. Been really fortunate that way. Been around great people.

One thing I can say about 29 years at Iowa, we've been so fortunate. We've had great players to work with, the coaches, whether as an assistant, as a head coach, we've had great coaches to work with. We've got a great administration.

Little known fact, we've had three athletic directors since 1970, and I don't think there's anybody close in the country. That has a lot to do with it. It's nice to come into work every day and know what's expected and what the expectations are and the way we're going to do things.

I look at myself as being very fortunate that way, and most importantly, getting to work with good people on a day to day basis.

Q. You talked about great people that you've worked with. You've worked with the great Bill Belichick. Talk about his impact on you and your coaching career.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: First thing I would say, he was a Hall of Fame Coach in Cleveland. That's my opinion. It's not like he just became a great coach when he went to New England. We had some interesting days there for sure.

You know, again, he's just one of many that's really impacted me. How could you not be influenced or impacted by him? I was fortunate, I got to work with both he and Ted Marchibroda, who was a veteran coach, had a lot of wisdom, too, and usually they were connected. Bill's first job was with Ted. Bill coming out of college was making 25 bucks a week and living in a hotel with about five guys driving around and it was his first job.

But again, everywhere you turn, you're with good people. Joe is going through the same thing. That's the great thing about our profession.

Q. You established a culture at Iowa for 20 years and now in your first year, how hard is it nowadays to walk in and establish a culture when everyone wants instant results?

COACH JOE MOORHEAD: I think certainly, when you, you know, 20 years total as an assistant and a head coach, when you have the opportunity and you become a next head coach, you're taking over because a guy before you has not done particularly well, or he's done somewhat well and had an opportunity to move on, and in my case it's the latter. Coach Vaughn did a tremendous job in laying the foundation and taking this program to a level it had not been before, and I think that's my job as a coach to try to build off of that.

And I think certainly, you know, the cultural aspect as you mentioned plays a part in that, discipline, accountability, work ethic, attention to detail, and you know, elevating the team from a very, very good level to where we want to go, which is to compete in championships on a yearly basis. I think that's the challenge. You're coming in and you're not instilling a culture for someone that has not had success, you're looking to build on it. I would say that's the most somewhat challenging aspect.

Q. Maybe the differences?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Coach Fry gave me my first job and he's the only guy in America that would have interviewed me, let alone hired me in 1981. Seriously, it was a strange deal. For some reason, he hired me.

So I spent nine years, and you know, so when I had a chance to come back, it was a no-brainer. I wasn't even thinking about college football quite frankly. But that was an opportunity on a professional level and personal level that made perfect sense. The idea was just to come in and do the best we could, and I think a lot of things that were very important to Coach Fry when he took over, you know, we kept those same values and principles and yeah, just try to keep moving forward.