

# Outback Bowl: Florida vs Iowa

Wednesday, December 28, 2016

## Kirk Ferentz Jim McElwain

THE MODERATOR: Just want to express our thanks and appreciation for both these teams and these coaches taking the time out today to be here but just everything that they do to help us in regards to the bowl game, couldn't have two finer individuals as head coaches not only from the coaching profession but just from the standpoint of working with these gentlemen with the bowl game and everything that we have to do to try and put on a great experience for their teams and their fan bases. Thank you very much from that standpoint. We're looking forward to a tremendous match-up. We're going to have a wonderful day, 80-degree temperatures on game day, great forecast for the rest of the week. We're looking forward to the next few days, and of course January 2nd, with a 1:00 kickoff on ABC TV to the nation and about 140 countries around the world.

We're going to start off here by asking Coach Ferentz to make brief opening remarks and then we'll have Coach McElwain do the same.

KIRK FERENTZ: Good afternoon, everybody. Certainly any time you play in a January bowl, two things usually are true: You play in a great bowl game and play a really tough opponent and that's certainly the case here being that the Outback Bowl is very, very special for our football team and we're playing an outstanding opponent in Florida.

Our team is excited to be here. Certainly to come out of the Midwest and be in such a great city, such great weather, we're thrilled about that, and then beyond that, having some experience playing in the Outback Bowl before, it's just a first-class event. The people here just with the committee, Jim right on through, everybody does a great job, and the city lends itself so well to a great bowl experience for our players, who are really happy about that.

Then we go against a really tough opponent, a team that's won the SEC East twice in a row, they're well-coached, they've got outstanding players, so we've got a big challenge on our hands that way. Certainly we're proud of our football team. They had a good fall, did a good job on the field, did a good job in the classroom. This is kind of a bonus game for us, and again, just a



real big challenge for us.

JIM MCELWAIN: Well, you said 140 countries? I'm not going to tell that to our guys. They might get scared. I'm not sure about that.

Obviously the word in our conference is this is one of those bowls that you want to come to because of the way they run it, the way the city of Tampa embraces everybody involved. Obviously the leadership in this bowl, Jim (McVay), his guys, I'm kind of honored this year to have Steve (Pratico) as the chairman actually because he's actually my lawyer, so he'd better not screw this thing up, all right, Jimmy? You got that?

But it's exciting. For our guys it's an opportunity to come down and play in a great Gator city that Tampa is, and being able to play a program that nationally year in and year out is one of those that you kind of set your sights on being like a team like Iowa. Obviously the consistency in which Coach and his staff have had throughout the years, every year this is one of those schools that you get an opportunity to play, and you look forward to it because it's a chance to test yourself against one of the best and one of the most consistent programs throughout college football.

For our guys, it'll be a great challenge. I know we're excited to be here. Our guys have had a great time so far. They enjoyed the whole team together last night at the bowling event, and by the way, the hot dogs were great, too. I'm a big hot dog fan. We're looking forward to it. Should be a lot of fun.

**Q. Kirk, I saw one of the videos where you talked about you were going to change some things up for bowl preparation. Can you get into anything specific about what you've done differently?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Really nothing revolutionary other than we tried to do more work in Iowa City and a little bit less down here. Our idea is to squeeze a trip down. We typically come down and do a couple days before we get into a game week routine. That's what we've been doing at bowl sites and we just opened up a beautiful new facility a year-and-a-half ago, so that was part of it. What we have at home lends us to being at home a little bit better, and I think the guys are comfortable. We have got a good place to train and work, so it's really just a little bit more of a shift that way

in terms of the days.

But we're trying to get our heavy lifting done at home and being able to streamline things a little bit more here. We'll see how it turns out. What knows?

**Q. What's practice been like so far in the heat, and how is the adjustment, and do you think their bodies will be adjusted by game time?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think they will. You don't want to wait until the last moment obviously to get down here just because of the weather change, but they had a chance to sweat yesterday a little bit, sweat today, and you know, it's kind of the first couple days any time you go to a bowl site it's usually not perfect, it's kind of like coming back after a break. As long as you do it, you'd think you'd figure it out, but it never looks perfect the first couple days getting back into it, but it's fine once you get acclimated.

**Q. You had a bunch of guys going into the break that you were unsure about whether they'd be able to play. Do you have any idea about that?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Can you imagine for the local guys that he's asking about injuries? Is this unbelievable? We still don't -- what the heck? But I promise you on Friday, I'll have the full report as to who's there. We've had some guys actually go through workouts. Today will be a full padded practice for us, so we'll be able to hit each other a little bit and kind of see where some guys are and kind of get a better idea on that. But nothing has really changed from that sheet that we went through prior.

**Q. Was Eddy (Pineiro) able to make the trip?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Yeah, he's here. He'll be out there today and do whatever he does. I don't know that he practices a ton, to be honest. I think he swings his leg around a little bit. So he'll do that.

**Q. In this day and age you don't see a lot of bowl games involving teams that -- your two defenses are so spectacular. What's it like looking across at the other sideline and seeing such a great defense?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'll put it in perspective. Last year was interesting, we played Stanford, and I think looked at their stats, they were about 445 a game, 440, somewhere in that ballpark. We would have signed on for that immediately and I would sign on lifetime for that. I think they were eighth or ninth in the Pac-12, so just, yeah, that's kind of scary, but that's kind of a trend right now.

One thing I've always believed in any sport, if you can play defense it gives you a chance, and that's one of the reasons we were able to be successful in

November. We didn't play so well defensively the first game of the month, but then we started to do it a little bit better, and you look across the field and that's certainly what we're looking at, a team that's been really good on defense the last two years, and they certainly are going to be a big foe for us that way.

JIM MCELWAIN: You know, it's interesting because when you watch teams play that give up a bunch of points, at the end of the day, the idea is to try to get into the fourth quarter with an opportunity to win, and great defenses do that for you. When you take a look, and I went all the way back to when we were at Michigan State and played against Iowa when Norm Parker was the DC and the carryover with Phil's is they do a great job of not allowing explosive plays. You know, when you do that, and you don't let teams get into the end zone defensively, you give yourself a great opportunity to be successful, and obviously in Iowa's case, that's why they've been successful for so many years.

**Q. How do you balance having fun versus getting ready for the game?**

JIM MCELWAIN: I think the big thing is, you're right, it's a reward, and it's a reward not only for the players but for all the people within the organization. I mean, our offices back in Gainesville are emptied out, and that's good, because they work their tail off. Anybody that is involved with the football organization, it's a chance for those families, the coaches' wives and the coaches' families to come and really enjoy in this case the great place that Tampa is. Yet at the same time what you do with your guys is say, look, here's the period of time you need to be locked in. Guys, this is time, we're trusting you, and you find out the trust of your team. You find out the leadership of your team. But when you're in that football environment for those hours, man, it's locked in and ready to roll. And from there, go out and enjoy yourselves, and it is a reward, and I know being at a bowl like this is a great reward?

**Q. Being in Tampa, does that help in recruiting being here?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Well, you know, it's a dead period so you can't really do anything anyway. But I think just our logo being on local television and being out there the way it is, it obviously is something that helps. I know this has been -- since we've gotten here, a big priority for us is this area.

**Q. Coach Ferentz, what do you expect to get out of Cole Croston?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think everything is looking good right now. The only real bad news we have, Manny Rugamba is not going to make it. They did an X-ray yesterday. We thought that might be a possibility.

He won't play, and then obviously Greg Mabin is not going to play with his fracture, Drake Kulick. Manny is out. Cole looks like he's in. Just see how he does this week, but hopefully he can play.

**Q. What did you call that, that he had?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Stress reaction.

**Q. Kirk, any advantage that you've seen Austin Appleby in previous years?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Not really. He played pretty well against us last year quite frankly, so I'm not real enthusiastic about seeing him again. It's not like we've got a great memory from last year's game, unfortunately, so no.

JIM MCELWAIN: We put that game plan in.

**Q. Jim, with Austin (Appleby), when you get to this point and there's a lot of clamor about playing a freshman, do you think he goes in there with a little chip on his shoulder?**

JIM MCELWAIN: You know, I don't think so because there wasn't any noise from the inside, so I think that's probably the biggest thing, and yet, I'm not sure, but just his first opportunity to be in a bowl game, so I know he's really excited about that, that opportunity to get the extra practice in and get an opportunity to play. I mean, that's one thing I think people don't really realize sometimes is the opportunity to go to a bowl and be involved in it, the way you're treated, the way the bowls themselves really make it special for the players is something that -- I don't think that feeling ever goes away.

**Q. It seems like you two really emphasize the use of special teams and the importance of special teams. Can we maybe get a comment on what your philosophy has been?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Well, you talk about it, a lot of people don't realize the hidden yardage in games that actually help you win games, that you gain field position that doesn't necessarily show up in the stats, and your coverage units themselves, and then obviously on punt returns, for example, being able to just get an extra first down by a return and keeping bodies on guys. In our case, obviously Johnny (Townsend) has had an outstanding career as a punter and has had another great year in which he's changed -- flipped the field for us. Sometimes like in that SEC Championship Game maybe kicked it a little too far for us, so we've got to do a good job keeping it out of their hands and make sure that we're having an opportunity through hang time and some things like that to be able to get down and cover.

KIRK FERENTZ: They do a great job on special teams and have great specialists. In our case, Ron Coluzzi

has probably been one of our unsung heroes quite frankly, and if you go back to us playing well down the stretch, special teams are a big, big part of that, and the impact he had on field position was really big, and we've been able to get field goals when we needed it, and Desmond (King) has done a really nice job in the return game. Desmond has been a really great addition to our football team this year.

**Q. When you look at bowl games, a lot of times they dictate the perspective and tone of teams, the way your programs are perceived. How important is it to win for that off-season momentum, and then versus how you guys both lost last year and how difficult it is to get off to the start --**

JIM MCELWAIN: Personally any time you get the opportunity to go compete, I don't care what it's in. If you want to go and play some dominos right now, I'm going to try to beat you. That's what it's all about. So any chance you get to go out and compete in whatever it is you do in life, that's great, and yet it's the lessons learned from the competition.

Sometimes the importance of winning the game is huge, but at the same time, it can work the other way going into the off-season. You know what, this is an opportunity now, guys, that we have to go prove ourselves once we get into the off-season. The fact you're in the bowl game is, number one, the most important fact. You get an opportunity to practice. You get an opportunity to get an extra spring ball in for a lot of your young guys, and that's huge. I don't think sometimes people realize the importance of that. But I go back, any time you get an opportunity to go compete, none of us are here for a participation ribbon, so by going and winning, that's something you try to do no matter what you do.

KIRK FERENTZ: Just echo what Jim said. The value of playing in a bowl as far as the extra work, being together. That's all very, very important. The experience is tremendous for everybody. As Jim mentioned, not just the players, but the staffs, families, all the people that work so hard during the course of the year. But as far as the game goes, to me this is just one more very important game in the 2016 season, and whether you win or lose, you have to deal with that regardless. You have to come up with the right response, and there are challenges to both certainly, but to me what's really important about the game is finishing this season and hopefully playing -- I think both teams are going to strive to play their best and then you let the chips fall where they may. It's really more about this team, the 2016 season and the seniors that have led this thing on both sides. I think that's really what it gets down to.



**Q. Coach, you weren't happy with last year's bowl result. Is there anything you've changed up in the way you guys have prepared?**

JIM MCELWAIN: No, I think the big thing was the mindset going in. We talked about your opportunity to be proud of what you put on film, and no matter what you're striving for, any time you're on film, you're being evaluated, whether you're a young guy going into next year, whether you're an older guy that's going on to the next level. Here's the opportunity for you to prove yourself.

I go back to that first year watching that Birmingham Bowl and seeing what Dante Fowler did. He went from a first-rounder into an early first-rounder with five sacks and changed the game. Here was an opportunity for him to say, I don't know whether I want to do this, but he took the other way, and man, it bolted him up that ladder, and I think those are things that guys really need to understand. It's an opportunity to be proud of what you put on film. And that's the challenge.

**Q. What have you seen from your seniors and your juniors?**

JIM MCELWAIN: You know what, our team has had really good practices. They've been locked in when we've been at practice. You see them around the building watching tape, which tells you that they're focused on the next task at hand, but time will tell.

**Q. What do you think last year's game did for them, going into the Michigan game?**

JIM MCELWAIN: You know, it's just the way it is. Sometimes it's the way it's built. And yet, you know what, they had a great year. I think a little bit in regards to the year before, what were we picked, like fourth in the east or something, and they ended up winning the SEC East, and I think maybe in some ways became a little satisfied with that. You've just got to keep driving forward, and every team has a different makeup. Like I said, time will tell.

**Q. So you like this team's makeup?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Yeah, they've been good. They've been good. I don't like all the injuries, but no coach does, you know. How's that? You were waiting for that quote, right?

**Q. Both coaches have significant graduate transfers; can you guys talk about the vetting process for each guy?**

KIRK FERENTZ: It was easy for us with our punting situation. We just felt like it was wide open. It wasn't anything that had been nailed down, so I think it was a good opportunity for Ron (Coluzzi). He knew coming in, he'd still have to earn it, and the credit goes to him. He did a great job from day one.

JIM MCELWAIN: We only had, I think, two quarterbacks on the roster, so that was pretty simple. You know, kind of the way it worked out, some of the local guys know a guy that was our policeman Pete the Cop when I was at Louisville. His college roommate was Austin's dad. Pete the Cop called and said, hey, do you need a quarterback, there's a guy graduating, I said, yeah, come on. So credit Pete the Cop. (Laughter.)

**Q. Kirk, it seems like this team was trying to find its identity in the early part of the year. Where do you think this team landed as far as its identity?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know if I'm good at branding teams, branding things. As I've said many times, our teams typically, if they're doing well, if they're going to have a good season, they get better as we go along, and I think that's probably what we saw with this football team. We had our ups and downs early in the season, had a really low down near the end of the season for the first week of November, but fortunately got back up and really fought back, so we're sitting there at 5-4 coming out of the ninth game. Really not unlike the '08 team, and then they really put their foot to the gas. I think no matter what kind of team you have and your makeup, you learn every week, probably every day, but certainly every week about how you're going to respond to things, how you meet challenges, those types of deals. The big thing is that we finished strong. The last three weeks we handled every circumstance pretty well and now we've got another challenge on our hands, and this one is equally big to a couple of the ones that we had in November.

You know, as Jim said, it's just a matter of how you handle the month, how you handle the challenges. Bowls are very unique that way. So it's one more thing to throw at the team and see what they do, how they respond, so it's still going on, and as I said to the earlier question, this is still part of the season, part of the '16 season, so we're eager to take the field and see what we can do.

**Q. Have you found the fourth corner yet?**

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we're still looking, and we left Iowa, so there's one back there. We're pretty much out of guys. That's just the way it is. It's just like the quarterback situation. We're not going to pull a redshirt. I did read about that, by the way. I don't know who's giving that advice, but we're not going to pull a redshirt off of anybody. We're out of guys. I suppose we could move somebody from the inside outside, but I'd have to think about that one for a while.

**Q. Can you assess the safety situation? How are you going to approach that with the game?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, it gives us more depth, and really, Anthony is one of the good stories. For us to have a good season, we need good stories and certainly he's one of the good ones. Fifth-year senior who really hadn't played much, wasn't playing much on special teams and then stepped in and really played well, and has continued to do so. So he'll start the game, and it's not a knock on Miles. They're both good players, but he's gone in and played well three games. They'll probably both play at some point. I don't think that'll determine the outcome of the game. I think what all it did for us is we learned that we have two guys maybe instead of one, so it's a matter of an upgrade there.

**Q. You've been to so many bowl games; how have you seen focus from one year to the next, and how do you get a sense for where guys are?**

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure I always have a good sense week to week where we are bowl-game wise. It's something you are always trying to figure out and at look and you just look for little indicators. But yeah, that's all you can do as a coach, just hope your guys are wired in, they're working hard, they're focused when they need to be focused and handling the things that are important. Again, bowl games are a little bit unique, because you are not in class right now. Once we got through finals, and I think our finals were the same week. Now you have a different set of circumstances to handle.

But the one commonality is that it's a unique circumstance and you're usually playing somebody that's really good. You know, we could go out and play a great game and get beat. That's the reality when you play in January bowls. It's just the way it is. And in our case it's interesting, we've been underdogs all but one of our bowl games now, or whatever it is, 14 times, so we're 13 for 14.

So we know we've got a hill to climb, and I think our players understand that, so we've got to really do things right. I think they get that, but still a matter of getting it to the game field.

**Q. You talked a lot about the Florida defense. What do they do specifically that make them such a challenge?**

KIRK FERENTZ: Where do you want me to start? They've got an NFL back end. That's a challenge. We're not exactly NFL stature on the outside necessarily. Their linebackers are really good. They've had injuries, and the guys that have stepped in have done a nice job. You always like to have your starting guys in there, but they've got several guys that play very well, and then up front, they've got a lot of guys who are very active and very talented, and they play

hard. They're a well-coached group. They're sound. They don't give up easy plays, big plays, so they're going to make you work, and just going to have to bang away and see what you can do. We're going to have to be opportunistic to have a chance to win this thing.

**Q. Jim, is it fairly simple in that they have a chance to have two 1,000-yard rushers and you're really good in the back end and they have thrown it really well this year? Do you just have to stop the run?**

JIM MCELWAIN: Well, I think it's one of the things you're built on defensively anyway is for you to really be successful, you can't allow a team to just pound the ball on you. You've got to at least force them to use both run and pass. I think the big thing that we've got to be aware of is obviously loading the box and then not being disciplined with your eyes and giving up the explosive plays on play action. For us, you don't see a lot of teams in today's offenses, and yet the important thing is you try to build your defenses to defend all the different things you're going to see throughout the season.

No secret, as any game we go into. It's about stopping the run first.

THE MODERATOR: Coaches, thank you very much.