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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First thing, I want to clarify one thing. I don't know if I've had a firm policy but I will assist or form one I guess.

As far as requests for assistant coaches, you can make them directly to me and I'll be happy to tell you probably no. Go from there. Maybe with an exception.

I'll try to make the coordinators available during the bye week; I say try, I think that's probably realistic and I've always tried to do that during Bowl preparations. We'll plan on continuing that, and I'm open to doing that in the out-of-season.

But the No. 1 reason for not doing is it these guys have a lot on their plates just like the players do and quite frankly I don't think it's part of their job description. That's my job to handle the media relations. It's our players' job to be at interviews; if they don't have a class conflict, and we'll do our best to suit you there. I believe our guys have enough to do trying to get a game plan ready, get the team ready and also look after our players. If you want to be mad, be mad at me on that one.

Injury-wise we are in pretty decent shape. Not sure if Paki will make it back, another good run in here and see how that goes this week. I think Tony Moeaki is probably doubtful, and then Bruce Davis may or may not be able to go. But I think outside of that we are in pretty good shape, so we feel pretty good about that.

Captain-wise got the same four guys as last week, King and Kroul on the defensive side, and Bruggeman and Shonn Greene again offensively. Go with those four guys.

It was a tough loss Saturday as we know. Two pretty good teams competing hard and all that being said, we are moving on. Our focus now is on

Indiana. We are on the road again and playing a team that is a very dangerous team, a team we haven't had much success against the last couple of years. And we didn't have much success with them when I first got here, either, and probably some parallels if you look at it.

They had a pretty dangerous player in Randall El back in the late 1990s, early 2000s and we feel the same way about Lewis. He's just a very, very dangerous player back there. He was a dangerous athlete a couple of years ago and now he's a dangerous quarterback. He's a guy that throws the ball well and a very explosive run on the football, and it starts right there with him. And then Thigpen is obviously one of the fastest players, if not the fastest player in our conference, and very, very dangerous. Two guys right there that you really have know about all the time.

They have a very excellent group of receivers and their line is doing a good job. They are balanced front pass-wise, and defensively very veteran up front, very veteran up front and their safeties have played a lot.

Corners, you know, they have had an injury out there, that's a little different story. But the guys up front if I recall, I think they sacked us nine times last year, so enough said right there. Both those ends are excellent players. Middleton gets a lot of publicity, and rightfully so, but the guy on the other side, Kirlew, is an excellent football player and just a tremendous football player. So you have those two guys out there, and the two guys inside are stout or what-have-you.

We have to be our best, and for us it all starts with taking better care of the ball; stating the obvious right there. And that's No. 1 on our list right now, so hopefully we'll get that addressed a little bit better.

Q. Two areas offensively seem to be a concern, third down conversions and scoring in the red zone. As you look back, what do you think the issues are there?

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COACH FERENTZ: Well, you know, we have failed on third down, short and long yardage, both, so we just had to do a better job there.

The red area ties in with turnovers and most notable, our last two games, we've opened up with pretty good drives, moved it down inside the 25 both times and turned it over both times. If I was going to pick one thing, we had two turnovers down there last week, so we just have to do a better job. Got to finish drives off and get the ball in the end zone; if not, give our field goal kickers a chance to get it done.

Q. Does Mossbrucker have a range?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, in our mind, in normal conditions, ball inside the 25. But we'll extend that. There was no wind really on Saturday.

But I've got every confidence in him and I don't want that to be lost over the decisions the other day. They had really nothing to do with him. Maybe a little bit to do with him, but it's not like we are going to -- he doesn't have training wheels on his bike. He's playing and he's like the rest of the guys and I've got every confidence that he can handle the situations that are out there.

Q. How much of a confidence-builder is it for the defensive line the way they were able to shut down Ringer the last week?

COACH FERENTZ: They did a good job. I mean, it was a real challenge. Michigan State has really run the ball well, and we played great back-to-back and we face another real good one this week.

I thought the guys responded to the challenge well, and then the challenges that took place during the ballgame, too, they did a pretty nice job. I think all but one time we kept them pretty well contained, but he's a great football player. It's a good thing.

Our defense is doing a lot of positive things and hopefully we can continue to improve on that. This will be a different challenge this week and a different kind of attack.

Q. Does it get frustrating with the way the defense has played and that the offense has not matched that and gotten the win last week?

COACH FERENTZ: That's football. We've explained that to our team: Doesn't really matter how you win, as long as you win. It could be in the course of the season, it might be a 42-38

ballgame, and the next week you might be 10-6, and it might be defense one week and special teams the next and during the course of the season that's usually how it works.

You know, you go back to 2004, we virtually didn't have a running game, so we had to lean on our defense. We had to do what we could offensively, and 2002 is probably the opposite. Our offense was pretty high octane pretty early on and how are defense had to catch up. That's just football. I think as long as the players understand, everything's fine, and I think our guys are doing a good job with that.

Q. In three games, you've lost by a total of nine points, when you kind of deconstruct the game in your mind and everything like that, does it get frustrating, or do you just say, oh, we are just a couple of plays away from being -- not necessarily record-wise?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, losing is frustrating, and the only thing worse is getting blown out I suppose, in that you're competitive and you have realistic opportunities. That's where we are at right now and usually it gets down to detail things. The turnovers are very prominent and typically prominent, special teams are typically prominent and penalties. I think all but one game we have been pretty good penalty-wise.

Turnovers have been a totally different story, and special teams, we have been erratic. We looked healthier Saturday but they have been erratic over the past month. Those right there are probably the three challenge areas.

And looking back at this game last year, other than you throw in those big plays, if you're giving up big plays, or consider a sack or a negative yardage plays, big plays, also. So those things factor in and that was really the story of the game last year, penalties were and sacks were, and we just didn't give ourselves much of a chance from the start.

Q. Was it as good of an experience playing some of those games where the safety gets sucked in by a play fake or maybe going the wrong way on a block or something like that?

COACH FERENTZ: That's usually when you look at things that cost you or keep you from winning, you know, experience factors in there quite a bit. We are at the six-game mark now, so

hopefully we are moving past crutch. At this point in the season, everybody has played, so now it's time to go and we need to get going here.

Q. When turnovers are a problem like they have been, you guys obviously stress it in meetings and stuff, but do you do different drills in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. We kind of talked about that a little bit last week.

I really think turnovers for the most part are concentration. Experience factors in. You know, it's concentration and it's also awareness of the situation. That was Rick's first one last week. Actually, both of them. Those are kind of awareness things, if you will. We had the first, so take your first down and let's move on to the next play, that's really not the time to fight for extra yardage.

Just in general terms, offensively any time you're down inside the 20, the last thing you want to do is have an interception, and you sure don't want to take a sack, things of that nature, just common sense football. So if you don't convert the touchdown, you have a good, realistic chance for a field goal. That's just part of the learning curve, so hopefully we are going to move right past that and clean up some areas of our play.

Q. Learning curve, what's it like right now, living with kind of the ups-and-downs of playing with a young quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: That's good and bad. That's kind of like our football team right now; there's good and bad. The good news is I think the bad is correctable, and I think the things that are keeping us from winning I think are addressable, correctable and we'll go from there.

The good news is our attitude is outstanding and the guys are playing with really good effort and they are practicing well. They are doing everything they can do to ensure that we are going to have a good season, and that's why I feel pretty good sitting here today even though we have lost three straight.

Our guys, they are doing a good job.

Q. Is it kind of one of those things with the experience factor where this is a team that needs to learn how to win those close games right now?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's part of the process, and it seems like that's where we are at right now. But that being said, we can't take

anything for granted, we have to make sure we are doing the A's, B's and C's before we are about the D's, E's and F's and that type of thing.

Again I think the guys are making the effort but we have to get over the hump somehow. You know, it's a team thing.

Q. You kind of touched on this, but is there a different feel to this team, even though you've lost three straight compared to last year?

COACH FERENTZ: Last year, we kind of were what we were. We had some obvious areas that we were short in, or more on experience than anything else. We talked about that from where we started in August to mid-season.

But the team last year, I tell you, they worked hard and I said that a lot of times, they worked hard and had a great attitude, and that's why we were going to get better last year and we did, and it was disappointing and this season is pretty much the same way. And that goes back to March 1 when we really got our focus on spring practice. They have been very good and we are getting great leadership from not only the obvious guys, the senior guys but the younger guys, too, are doing a good job.

So that's really all that you can ask of a team. Obviously we want to play a little smarter, a little cleaner and we have to if we are going to start winning some football games. It's been an enjoyable team to work with, and you know, I don't see that changing, I really don't.

Q. How is their passing game different without Hardy around?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, you know, the guy is a great player. He was a marquee player, so it's like anybody losing a marquee player. That's notable.

But that being said, their group overall is a good group and they really do all the little things right and catch the ball and they run good routes and they hustle. They are just a good group. He's hurt us in the past but the other guys have, too. They are all -- I think they just collectively pick up the slack.

Q. With Lewis throwing and running, does that change the way you approach?

COACH FERENTZ: Him as a receiver you mean? A little bit. Basically he's dangerous

wherever he is. So you know, it's a little bit like Randle El, too. He's done pretty well as a receiver. Or at least I assume he has; I haven't followed it real closely. I know he was playing well in Pittsburgh.

The guy is just a good football player and he's probably not -- not probably, he's a better passer, better thrower than Randle El was. Randle El hurt you with his feet a little bit more, but this guy can do it both ways. That's a tough match up for anybody that plays him.

Q. Obviously the pressure to win, do you feel that given the start that this team has, it's a feeling that you have a good team; just talk about the pressure.

COACH FERENTZ: We are going to keep it real simple like we did last week. We just want to win this week. That's really all we worry about and all we need to worry about. That was our goal last week and we came up a little short. Hopefully we can do a little bit better this week, and we'll work worry about next week, next week; and take a week off and see what happens after that. Right now we are just going to worry about Saturday.

Q. Talk about the true freshmen, tapered off a little bit for a couple of players, Demarco, Brad Herman, where do they fit in and do you have any regrets that you kind of threw them out there?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really because there's a lot of football ahead of us. We have got half our season still in front, and as we've seen in the past, anything can happen. We are not banking on a rainy day at all with those guys. The only downside is if they end up not playing a lot.

To me I go back to A.J. Edds, that's kind of what I took away from his experiences. I think he played prominently in one game, all season, but just the progress he made as a player working with our No. 2s every day and going through the game planning session, all those types of things, I think it really advances a player and accelerates him. I think that outside of the linemen, it's a good investment. That's kind of the consensus we have come up with as a staff.

Q. How is Dan Doelring?

COACH FERENTZ: He's working his way back in. He's playing fine. The other guys are good. Yeah, he just missed probably four or five weeks, and I wouldn't say he's full speed still. He still has that brace on there, that I guess you call it

a brace, a plastic cast. It's just made it tough for him to operate but he's working hard doing what he can with one hand basically.

Q. How would you say Stanzi is handling everything mentally?

COACH FERENTZ: He seems fine. We were on the field Sunday and saw him in the weight room and he seems fine. You know he's a mentally tough guy, and so is Jake. I think all of our quarterbacks are. They have all great the right mentality. Yeah, it's part of football, and it's like anything else. I don't think anybody on our team thought anything was going to be easy, and I'm sure Rick didn't think it was going to be easy.

But that being said, I think he's done a lot of good things, too. The attitude is great and I think he's got good mental toughness, so I'm not worried about that.

Q. What's the biggest challenge for him right now going forward?

COACH FERENTZ: Just improving, like everybody on our team. Coaches, too. We can all do a better job, and that's what we have to do.

So, you know, just keep it simple and that's what we have got to really do right now.

Q. Shonn Green, can he gain 100 yards on Sunday, do you see that for him?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's in his future, certainly. A lot of water to cover before we get there, but right now I'm focused on the six games he's got scheduled left, and you know, taking care of those.

Most impressive thing I think he's done, I've said this a couple of times now, it's just consistent performance. He's not a 200-yards in one game and a 42 in another. Although, that being said, if somebody wants to take him away, they can do that and we could see that as early as this Saturday.

I walked in last night, caught the -- whatever you call them, the highlights on ESPN of the Vikings and Saints game, but I did hear the guys say that the running back from the Vikings had 30-something yards. If he wanted to take the back out of the game, he could take him out of the game. I didn't see the game but I guess they paid for it in other ways, with 30 points -- I'm on a tangent here.

He's playing well. He's really playing well.

Q. What about Shonn's age?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not worried about that. He's not on social security yet. (Laughter).

You know, right now, he just needs to worry about each game. That's best thing that he can do and the best thing that all of us can do, and we'll cross that bridge whenever we get to it, and we've been there before with a couple of players. I hope he plays well enough where he has a choice. That would be great.

Q. A lot of players in the Big Ten are getting a lot of publicity, does Shonn look at that and think -- inaudible.

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't asked him. I don't know. Shonn's got a lot of pride and I'm not sure he cares or knows -- I'm sure he knows who the other guys are. They are all good players.

I tell you, Sutton, I keep going back to him, he's as good of a player as there is in our conference. I mean, relative terms, I hate to rank guys, but that guy, you don't hear his name a lot in the discussions, but boy is he a good back. Ringer is a great back. McCoy was awfully good and I'm sure there are some guys down the road we'll see, including Thigpen this week. I'm sure Shonn takes pride in his performance, and have I haven't asked him but I'm sure he's worried about his performance and happy for the success he's had. He's worked hard.

Q. Is McNutt transitioned out to wide receiver and kind of half and half?

COACH FERENTZ: Kind of amphibious, ambiguous, amphibious, whatever. He's working more at receiver right now, but we don't exactly have a third quarterback in the bullpen right now either, so he's doing a little bit of both. I think we are in transition and see how it goes.

Again, we are fairly young at that position and Marvin I think has got a lot to offer. If we can kind a way for him to help our team, I think he's all for it and we would be all for it.

Q. Do you see him getting any stabs at wide receiver?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see. His legs are trying to catch up a little bit. He's been through two years of inactivity as a quarterback, so he's got sore feet, sore knees, sore everything else right now. That's a tough job being a quarterback.

Q. Talk about Trent's playing progression; is he a true freshman?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a guy that we really felt good about in recruiting, the kicking, we thought he was a pretty good kicker -- I won't go down that road. He's pretty good that way.

We just really liked his mentality. He's a very mature guy. He's a competitive guy, played multiple sports. His dad was a state heavyweight champion not that that anything to do with it I don't think it did but it does a little bit. There's just something about Trent that gives you confidence.

He's done very well. I'm sure he's going to have some disappointment ahead like all of us do in our careers, but we'll weather it well and he'll come right now and he's not a guy you worry about and he's not fragile that way, and I'll just interject this, too, I think Daniel Murray, boy, he had a great game Saturday, and his kickoffs, we are counting on him right now; that's his role, and we are counting on him to do a great job with kickoffs and our kickoff coverage was less than spectacular two weeks ago.

And it looked a little bit healthier last Saturday and a big part is Daniel gets the ball where he wanted it and that is really good to see. He's doing a really good job, too. He's got a grade constitute on top of it.

Q. Brodell had some pretty big plays in the last two weeks with the punt return and catches, is it see him to get back in the flow of the offense right now?

COACH FERENTZ: It's really good and I think we need that. I think for us to have a chance to be successful, all of our veteran guys had to do a good job and it's certainly, certainly good to see that, and Brandon Meyers has been playing pretty well, so it's good there, and like to get Tony back in the mix here one of those days and hopefully we can get that, too. It's great to see Andy work hard and see him make those plays.

Q. Despite the fact that they have lost these last three, is the team ready to get to that point where it all clicks and they get on a run; do you feel confident that that's a real possibility?

COACH FERENTZ: I like the way the guys are working. I like the way they are playing for the most part. We just have to get over the hump. That's in our hands and we have to do it.

We know six teams are going to try to resist that, so that's the challenge in front us. But the guys, the attitude has been good and they are working hard. Just at some point we are going to get there.

Q. Confidence is not an issue?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think it is. I don't know. I don't think it is.

Q. You talked earlier how Indiana was able to get nine sacks last year on you guys, is that something that you remind the offensive line about as they prepare for this week in terms of motivating them, or do you just not even bring that up?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not real big on that. I'm more I guess an advocate of let's play better football than we have in the past and certainly than we did in this game this year. We did some things well in the game last year, but penalties and protection were not two of the things we did well.

Hopefully, and we are not going to win again this year if we allow that to happen. We got in a situation where we had to throw probably more than we would have liked to and that's not a good deal, either. Hopefully we can play the game a little bit more on our terms and that will help but I also think we are a little bit better than we were a year ago, also. So hopefully that will factor in, too.

Q. How do you think your offensive tackles will go against some of the best defensive ends, how have they formed, and is this week any greater going up against Anderson?

COACH FERENTZ: It will be a test, and you know, last year going back to last year, too, that's really after that game we made the decision because he couldn't go on. He was trying to play and we had him at left tackle and moved Calloway over to right tackle, and that probably was not fair to him at that point, but we did it; I did it.

So anyway it was after that that we reassessed and it's going to be another challenge because both of these guys they really played hard in their talent but the good news is is I think we are more capable than we were a year ago, too, so it ought to be a good map up. Their whole front is very veteran and experienced and our guys are gaining ground, so it ought to be an intriguing match up to see how we do.

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