

November 11, 2014



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Captains are the same four guys. We have Louie Trinca-Pasat and Quinton Alston on defense and Brandon Scherff, Mark Weisman, offensively.

Medically, I think most of you know, Travis Perry unfortunately is going to be out for the rest of the Big Ten schedule, he's got an injury that's going to take at least four weeks to get healed up, four or five weeks.

Tough break for him, certainly a young guy that's been doing well for us. Obviously we travel on the road again here. We head down to Champaign for a contest with Illinois. And they're a team that's been playing really hard.

I know they're enthused about getting their quarterback back with them. He's been out for a couple of weeks with an injury. Sounds like he practiced last week. And obviously a couple games ago they beat Minnesota. They're a team that's playing hard. We'll have to do our best to get ready to go here.

Q. Can you talk about some of the reasons why the team has been so inconsistent?

COACH FERENTZ: No, No.

Q. Have you ever had to deal with that before, and is it quite like this?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about that. Teams ebb and flow. What are you going to do? We'll just go back to work and try to get ready for this ballgame.

Q. Teams have been able to run outside on you, sweeps like Minnesota, and

teams try to extend the perimeter like Indiana, what are some of the common elements of that in their success?

COACH FERENTZ: You just had it. Hitting the perimeter. Good play against us. We're pretty veteran inside. So we're giving up more rushing yardage than we care to, certainly, not only just last week but over the course of the season that's something we'll have to shore up, because I imagine we'll see more of it.

Q. The plays that Drew was in the C gap, which allowed the running back to get outside and clip up --

COACH FERENTZ: Drew Ott?

Q. Yeah, coming down, heading outside and David Cobb would come up and take out Bo Bower, somebody like that. Was it more schematic in some of the approach or --

COACH FERENTZ: Usually anytime a run's successful, it's a good scheme. You don't play it well enough. And hopefully with every defense we've got a chance to stop any play, run or pass. But you've got to play through blocks and make plays and usually it involves more than one guy.

Q. The opening drive you guys looked great. What happened there that didn't happen the rest of the game?

COACH FERENTZ: How do you explain two weeks ago to last week? It's the same question. It's just, this isn't a video game. It's not a deal where you just plug plays in or plug things in. Anything involved in people, just look around the country. College, pro or high school. It's really hard to predict what's going to happen any week. I don't think it's any different than any other season.

So you gotta get ready to go. That's all I know. You gotta get ready to go, have a good week of practice and preparation and go play well.

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If you do those things, you give yourself a good chance. If you don't, the door's open.

Q. As a head coach, do you usually have a good feel, do you think, how your team's going to perform?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. I've been surprised before. It wasn't like that was the first time. But we felt like we had a good week of preparation. I thought our focus was good, including on the trip. But the demeanor was good as a team. And we ran up against a team who had better demeanor and better focus and they played really well. We didn't play well. And you would combine those two, it's like the weather from yesterday to today, it's not a good thing.

Q. Have you been more surprised this year both good and bad than any other season?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think that's a fair assessment, no, just you never know. That's sports. You never know what's going to happen. And we're done looking backward right now. We're looking forward and see what we can do about this week.

Q. You look at field position, battle for field position, they have an outstanding punter. And your punters have struggled some. Is that a big area of concern going into this game, the field position game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it was a big factor Saturday, if you look at their starting position, average field position and ours, it was a huge factor Saturday, as well as turnovers, the basics, penalties, turnovers. And the deal Saturday was turnovers, special teams, I think.

I mean, one of the deals. It's not as simple as that. But these guys have a great punter; this guy is one of the best punters in the country. So if you look at it this season, overall punting is not a huge discrepancy between us and our opponents.

I think it's about two, two and a half yards. It hasn't been a major factor, but Saturday certainly starting field position was really tilted their direction and that probably is part of the reason why we felt we were running up hill all day long.

Q. When you go to recruiting, do you look at a punting or do you think one of these guys will emerge?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see. We've got three weeks left. We'll let the guys continue to compete.

Q. Before Lunt got hurt, looked like a much different quarterback than the guy we saw. What do you see on tape I guess his improvement over where he's at?

COACH FERENTZ: I never got to see him at Oklahoma State. I didn't watch a lot of TV, a lot of conferences. But we see a guy who is a really good player. Good thrower. We knew that when he came out of high school. It's fair to say he's matured; he's playing his best football this year.

Q. Jordan Canzeri looks like he's available this week.

COACH FERENTZ: Flashback there. If Carson's available, we'll take him. We'd probably get investigated on that one.

Q. He's available. How much, speaking to his resiliency, he keeps coming back, keeps weathering all this?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a bad year for him in general. Put it in one little capsule. And he was eligible to play the other day. He didn't look great in practice. And I told Steve I don't think putting Walter Payton in would have changed things on Saturday. There's no sense having him go backwards. So we expect him to be healthier and hopefully he'll be part of our rotation Saturday.

Q. This is your third straight opponent coming off a bye week, you were also coming off a bye week. You talked earlier about you're more concerned about starting every conference, it seems on the road, but going through this with bye weeks, what do you think about that?

COACH FERENTZ: We seem to be the object of quirks, I guess. But we're not the lone ranger. It's like anything, if you want to use that as a crutch, you can use it. But it still gets down to who plays the best Saturday.

And certainly they've had a little bit more opportunity to rest or get ready. And I'm sure they'll do a good job taking advantage of that. We have ample time to get ready. It's not like this game is being played on Wednesday or Thursday. So it's really about what we do this week in terms

of our preparation and most importantly what we do at 11:00 on Saturday.

Q. Going forward, the passing game, it seems like protection was the major problem Saturday. Going forward --

COACH FERENTZ: It was one of the problems, yeah.

Q. Facing teams that will be good at putting pressure on quarterback, what are the fixes there?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if you charted this stuff or not, but Illinois probably blitzes more than most teams we've played the last couple of weeks at least. That's going to be a different set of challenges for us. And bottom line is it's a big part of passing games. To be successful you have to protect. You gotta give the quarterback time to get his feet set and go through his reads and progression, if there are some. But it all goes together. We've got to run better routes, get free better and catch the ball when it's there.

Q. Talking about the sweeps and run defense, is that a little bit of losing three linebackers from a year ago, it's not to single out the guys playing right now, but is that one of the growing pains a little bit?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're not as good at linebacker as we were a year ago. We knew that in August. We knew it in January. And so that's part of the deal. But we're probably a little bit better up front. So that's college football. You're always having change and evolution, if you will. And we still have an opportunity to play good team defense and that's what we have to do.

We have played good defense at times. So it's just a matter of being more consistent like all the other things that we're doing too, offensively or special teams.

Q. After a performance like that, how much do you balance with going through films or preparation with really heavily evaluating it and just getting rid of it really quick because it was almost an aberration?

COACH FERENTZ: There's been occasions, and I can't remember, cite the year, you know, somewhere in the mid or late '80s where I remember distinctly we lost a game on the road and just came back and gave everybody Sunday off.

It was just one of those deals where we thought it was best to get everybody away from the building for a day, and I think maybe we skipped a film or two since I've been back. But I can't remember what game it would be if we did that.

So typically what we do we'll come in, look at it, good, bad or indifferent, learn from everything good or bad. But the trick is to move on once you get past it. And you've heard me say it before, players and coaches aren't like fans or media folks. We can't sit around and digest or dissect it.

We've got to move on and get ready for the next challenge. And so if you do a good job of that, you'll give yourself a chance to compete well Saturday. If you don't, you know, it's like when you're a kid you can't let the same match burn twice. If you do that, then fool me once on that one.

Q. When your team struggles with consistency, Coach, do you evaluate things and try to approach a week differently than you did, or do you stay in your --

COACH FERENTZ: We evaluate every week by week. Just good, bad, indifferent, in the course of the season you play 12 games, you're not going to play the kind of consistency you want. Our best teams haven't been -- there's room for improvement every time you come off the field. So it's still the same challenge. It's about correcting things you don't do well.

Seeing what you can do to shore things up, factoring in injuries, factoring whatever it may be, the variables of that week and you try to get ready as intelligently as you can for the next opponent.

Q. What more has to happen up front to get the running game, get Mark going specifically?

COACH FERENTZ: I guess we have to flash back to two weeks ago and get it going. There's no magic answer here. I don't think. Unless you guys know of any. You've got to play well. You've got to play better.

Q. Two pretty good wide receivers, not that quarterback is back, what are the challenges they present with that good arm?

COACH FERENTZ: They're going to throw the football, we know that. They do a lot of different things. They have and they do, and if you

go back a couple years now.

They make you prepare for a lot of different things and looks. Certainly it changes quarterback to quarterback. But the receivers are all very good. They're built to throw the football, and they've got good receivers and Lunt is a really good thrower.

Q. I know you hand a lot over to your seniors because there's a degree of respect there. But how much do you hand to them as far as the rudder of the team, emotional content, that kind of thing?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the center of any good team is its seniors. And veteran players. If you've got guys that have played a couple of years, Blythe is not a senior but he's played a lot of football. So certainly we're counting on him to play well.

But also be part of the solution, part of the guys that help move us forward here. So it all starts with that, and then just try to get everybody else, make sure they've got both feet in the circle and they're moving forward with us.

Q. Against Minnesota, some internal yelling on defensive, that's something I don't really -- haven't seen for a long time here.

COACH FERENTZ: You've seen it. It's happened here before. This is a competitive game. We're not playing well. I'd be really unhappy if guys were happy. If everything was rosy, rosy and tidy, that would be a bad thing. Or if it didn't hurt guys or they bounced back quick. There's a lot of guys in the NFL that bounce back real quick, and that's not a good, to me not a good characteristic to possess if you're a competitor.

Q. One of the most collectible things from Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: I'll start with the obvious stuff. We've got to play better on special teams. If nothing else, you've got to break even there. You can't put yourself in the hole. That and the other obvious thing is turnovers.

It's hard to win Big Ten games if we're 0 and 3, three down in the count the other day. And it's age old. But that's an important stat no matter what you do. You have to protect the football better, and then we just have to play better. Play better in every phase. But start with the special teams and the turnovers not in that order, probably turnovers first.

Q. I think you had the lead in all three of the losses. And you guys have scored most of your points actually this season in the first quarter, which shows you're coming in prepared. Are other teams just adapting to you or --

COACH FERENTZ: No, I think there's a period, I think -- you guys know better than I do because you follow closer than I do -- but there was a period in this season where we weren't scoring initially. Then we start scoring early.

There's a 60-minute game. There's no way to predict anything. It's a 60-minute game. Adjustments get made. But usually game plans are done getting in there and those are the major parts. And you have to adopt or adjust to whatever your opponent might be doing.

But it still gets down to playing the full game. And there's a lot of, during the course of the season, a lot of different stories that take place during the 12-game season.

Q. Pretty good rivalry, now you haven't played them in for six years. To get them back on the schedule and --

COACH FERENTZ: I've said it before. It's kind of weird. I did an awards luncheon over in Quad Cities across the river in April. And that was the first time it really struck me driving over, I don't know why I was thinking of it, but started thinking about playing in Champaign and it struck me odd that we haven't been there since '08.

But it's the next state over. So it's kind of weird that way, especially if you're in the same conference. But that's probably a reflection of this expansion era that we're living in and college sports have changed in a lot of different ways and this is just one more illustration of it.

So I think it's good. I think it's one of the nice things about the East/West Division in the conference. I think it's really going to be, just feels a bit more natural. And so if we don't play Rutgers for six years, I don't know when we play them, but that's not as big a deal as when you don't play one of your border states.

Q. With Akrum Wadley, he's done some really good things, but he's also a young guy, how do you handle things with him?

COACH FERENTZ: Same thing with Jonathan, really. Nobody had a more devastating game than Jonathan Parker in that Ball State

game.

But again, just the same comments I made about Jonathan. Jonathan practiced and played well. You can tell he's fully invested. With younger guys, you'll have to ride the roller coaster a little bit and you hang on. But as long as they're demonstrating in the areas we evaluate that they're really trying to move forward, then you just gotta live with those things sometimes.

And we're coaching them, don't get me wrong. But all that being said, you can bring back Vince Lombardi, there's certain things that are going to happen sometimes and you just gotta try to weather that.

Q. Not something you've seen in practice with him?

COACH FERENTZ: No, we're not tackling him in practice either. So it's a whole different deal. Different venue. Comes out a little different sometimes.

Q. Throwing, a part, but assuming Lunt will be back or --

COACH FERENTZ: You have to prepare for all three, all three are a little different chapters and on top of that they've got a lot of whatever Coach Fry called them exotics. They do a lot of things that over the course of, if you go back a couple of years, there's a lot of different things that you're going to see.

You can't practice them -- first of all, we break the 20-hour rule; and secondly you'd have a dead team Saturday. But you gotta cover a lot of stuff, because they certainly have a volume of things that you have to get prepared for. But the bottom line the game will probably get decided on the meat and potatoes of it and every quarterback is a little different chapter for them.

Q. The pieces at linebacker, now does Q go back to the middle with Travis out?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll start out with Q there. And Josey at the Will and outside we're constant there.

Q. Reggie, will he work back in?

COACH FERENTZ: He'll try to work back in the rotation at Will. And Cole, Cole will float a little bit.

Q. John Kenny, is he only on offense now?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's our second fullback. Good news is we've got Macon back and he's back there. Chad Gilson will probably work a little bit of linebacker again. We borrowed him on the other side.

And it's a tough one there. We can't get him on the field. He's a great guy. He just practices. And I'm really glad he's on our team. He's a great young guy. But he's kind of caught right now behind some other guys.

Q. Quarterback, are you done with the thought of trying to get C.J. in certain series, is it more traditional now with Jake for the most part?

COACH FERENTZ: We really haven't had a lot of discussion. So we'll just keep playing here see where it all goes.

Q. How do you classify Reggie's experience, seems like he's been in a series of tough lessons, if you will?

COACH FERENTZ: Outside of the last two weeks, what else? Help me out if I'm missing something here.

Q. Learning to be a starter.

COACH FERENTZ: Josey is going through the same thing. I'll go back to camp. Both those guys are competing for that spot. Josey got injured, busted his hand, so Reggie got it by default.

Now it's going the other way by default. So we'll just let them keep one -- but they're both good young guys, but they're young guys, we knew that. And Bo is a young guy as well on the outside.

So we're playing some young guys. You can do the math right there. There's three young guys I just mentioned. But we're also ten games into it or nine games into it. So they're not as young as they were back in August, and they're both all three of them are gaining ground and improving.

Q. When you have a new starter, and you have -- you had more this year than people probably have noticed, what is the general breaking period? Do you have something in mind?

COACH FERENTZ: It depends on the players. Everybody's different. Some guys just

jump in and go and others it takes a little bit longer. But typically first time you're on the field as a player, especially a younger guy for a second year, third year guy, it takes a little bit longer. Depends on the position, too.

Q. What makes the season a success at Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: My standards?

Q. Yeah.

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. You just assess the year when it's over. I'm not at that point. We've still got three games we're focused on, and the only one that counts is this one.

Those kinds of things you talk about in the out of season. But right now we're trying to assess this week coming up and get ready for it.

Q. Tight ends have been kind of -- is it they just haven't been open? I assume that's true, that's the reality?

COACH FERENTZ: The ball goes where it goes. I don't know what to tell you there. No, we're not trying to conceal them or keep them out of the plan, I'll put it that way. Things haven't changed that way.

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