

November 25, 2014



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome and happy Thanksgiving early.

Captains this week are the same guys, Louis Trinca-Pasat and Quinton Alston on the defensive side, and Brandon Scherff and Mark Weisman offensively. Same four guys there.

Health-wise, Henry Krieger Coble reinjured his shoulder back in practice midweek last week. Unfortunately he had to get that repaired yesterday. He's doing fine, but he'll be out for the rest of the year here. That's a tough turn for us.

Then we turn our sights on Nebraska now. Excited to be back in Kinnick for a second straight week. Just on that topic, last week's crowd was just unbelievable. It was a great environment in Kinnick. We sure do appreciate the support that we got Saturday.

We'll need it again. We're playing a talented football team in Nebraska. Very dynamic, very athletic, very skilled. We started our work last night on them. Try to finish up a good week of preparation, getting ready for the football game.

Q. It's almost like when you get behind, Jake Rudock almost becomes a different quarterback. Do you have any idea why?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's really done a pretty good job of doing whatever we ask him to do. Game circumstances certainly alter the way you play. We were behind against Ball State, needed to move fast. He did a great job there. Same thing in the Maryland game. We threw the ball more than we wanted to. Saturday, same thing. You don't get a lot of possessions against that team.

I think he's done a great job. Like a lot of players, he continues to improve as his career goes on.

Q. You said at the beginning of the year you needed and expected Jake to improve his game. How has he improved?

COACH FERENTZ: He's just a better player. It's usually the formula for our best players. They improve during their careers. It only happens if they've got the right attitude, the right work ethic, the right mental toughness. Certainly Jake excels in all those areas. He puts a lot of time into his preparation, takes great pride in it. Mental toughness, working through just putting the work in that's necessary. He's got a lot on his plate outside of football certainly to carry the kind of GPA he does as a premed student.

Also to enjoy the peaks or valleys. That's part of being an athlete, a competitor. You have to go through the ups and downs, handle those. He plays a position that attracts a little bit more attention and criticism. It takes a special, unique individual to be able to succeed at that spot.

Q. Krieger Coble, is he out for the bowl, too?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. Probably about a multi-month repair here. We're looking at spring with him.

Q. Greg Mabin showed a lot of effort tracking down that 88-yard run.

COACH FERENTZ: That has potential to be a really big play anytime that happens. I think back to 2003, Bob Sanders tracked down Jason Avant, who I think just signed somewhere. I think Kansas City. We ended up holding them to a field goal at that point and ended up winning the game by three points.

If you're a good football player, you never quit on a play because you just don't know at the

end of the game how it's going to factor into the equation.

That's something I would hope all our guys would do if somebody breaks out of there.

Q. Friday is Kevonte's 50th game. Can you talk about his impact?

COACH FERENTZ: The numbers back it up. He's really had a productive career here for us. He's got a great attitude and obviously good durability to play as much as he has played. We have a group of 16 seniors that will be playing their last game in Kinnick, which is always special. He certainly is at the forefront of that group.

He's played a lot over a long period of time. You go back to '11. His picture is up on the wall in the office, the Pitt game. He's had a great career.

Q. Louis came off the field Saturday, went back in. What is his status this week?

COACH FERENTZ: We hope he can play. We got a lot of guys banged up. It was a pretty physical ballgame on both sides. Amazing how few injuries there were considering the physicality of the game. Outside of Henry, I think we're ready to go.

Q. How would you describe Mark Weisman to someone as a player and a person?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a great story, first of all. Just his route to get here, then what he's done since he got here.

Part of that being we really had no idea or appreciation for what he would become his first year on campus. He's a great guy. He worked hard and took care of business. There's no way to forecast what was going to take place.

After the first spring, we were pretty confident we had a really good fullback on our hands. Then the rest of the story unweaved in 2012. To accomplish what he's accomplished already is fantastic.

Hopefully he'll end up in the record books. He already has. He's in a pretty elite category, a lot of categories that are pretty significant. I think he's got a great future beyond college football.

The best part he's an unbelievably great young man. Extremely quiet, extremely humble. I don't know if we have anybody that works harder or does things right better than he has.

Q. Why do you see for him in an NFL future?

COACH FERENTZ: People play fullbacks in the NFL. He'd be a highly skilled fullback, pretty good running back. But as a fullback, he has a really unique talent that way. Better market for that. There are only 32 teams in the NFL, probably a better market in pro football than there is in college football for fullbacks.

Q. Do you think 8-4 would be a successful season?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll talk about all that stuff later on. Right now 8-4 would be great because that's the best we can do. That's our goal.

Q. Is there significance in that because you reached it last year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we have two cracks to get there. You could play that game. It's like last week. We wanted to win last Saturday, now it's Friday. The only thing that's changed is the day. That's our goal, is to win this week.

Q. Talk about playing on Friday.

COACH FERENTZ: I kind of like it actually on a couple fronts. At this time of year, I think it's doable, realistically doable. In the early part of the season, you need nine days to get ready for a game and they don't give you that. That's how it feels. Later in the year, if you're doing things efficiently, it probably forces you to be more efficient. That's a good thing.

The other part is you get to watch everybody sweat on Saturday sitting there with your feet up. Not a bad deal.

Q. Did you hear about Odell Beckham's catch, one of the best in the NFL? Do you remember the catch he made in front of your bench?

COACH FERENTZ: Unfortunately, I was standing way too close to it. Really impressive. That's what somebody said yesterday morning, right? They made that connection right away, the catch he made on our bench. The other guy they had from LSU maybe might have been not equally as good, but good. Two outstanding receivers.

Q. Looking at Nebraska's front four, they have three really stout, physical guys, one

super freak athlete.

COACH FERENTZ: It's a really interesting matchup. We haven't played anybody as big and physical as this group. Those two guys inside are huge. They look like somebody slipped them in from Sunday. One of those deals.

At least they're at their advertised weight. Both really good players. Then the outside, one outside end is a big, physical guy. Then you have a really talented pass-rusher at the other spot. They move him around a lot, use him in a lot of creative ways. Have a couple different ways to package him to take advantage of his unique abilities and skills. First of all, you got to know where he's at, what he's doing. Secondly, you have to be at your best fundamentally to counter his skills.

Q. When he's on right or left, he seems to move around a lot. Is he a guy that Jake has to look out for?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope not. We'll do what we do. They also use him in the middle. They'll walk him around, come to various spots, too. Pretty much every gap is covered. He could show up anywhere, I guess, is the point. We're just going to have to try to do a good job of trying to block him. It's easier said than done.

Q. Carl Davis made a play on Gordon with one hand where he was blocked?

COACH FERENTZ: That was a good play. A really good play. He's one heck of a player. Carl has had a really good year, a good career here. That other guy is pretty good, too, like really good.

Q. The wide receiver ranks this year, would you say this group has improved?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so, yes. I think we're a lot better than we were. We're making progress. I thought we were better Saturday than we probably have been for a while. So it was good. Good to see some other guys get involved. Matt VandeBerg was probably the most productive guy we've had, a guy we think has a chance to be a really good player here. The more guys we can get involved Saturday, the better we're going to be as a team.

Q. Jordan Canzeri is back returning kicks. Do you think he thrives on that position?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he likes it. J.P. was doing a great job back there. We just have had some issues fielding the ball. Jordan I think gives us a little better security. I think he enjoys that.

Q. Do you think that helps a running back get in the flow?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if it helps him, but I don't think it hurts him. I don't think it's a bad thing at all.

Q. At the end of the first half, how difficult is it to straddle the field and decide whether you're going for it or kneeling on it?

COACH FERENTZ: It's an easy answer there. If we knew we were going to convert on fourth, we would have done it a lot sooner. What you don't want to do is let your opponent have a chance to get the ball down the field, then kick a field goal. You don't want to give up three points.

It's an unusual situation. Like I said, if I was confident and convinced we were going to make it on fourth, shoot, we would have gone a lot sooner. You can't take that risk. I thought it was really well-operated, well-officiated. Just didn't work out.

Q. Are you going to continue to have Ike play tight end with Henry out?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see. It's a possibility. I mean, we're kind of running out of guys. It's getting close. It's the last game of the year. I'm sure they're doing the same thing. They'll use anybody they can. We have a lot of time to rest afterwards.

Q. Do you feel like Jake is taking that next step?

COACH FERENTZ: He's really come up big for us, playing well. Hopefully that will give him more confidence to play well. I feel really good about what he's doing.

Q. Is it confidence with him?

COACH FERENTZ: I think with every player, the more you have success, the better you feel about yourself. Typically it's not a bad thing when a guy experiences a little bit of success. Sometimes it can be, but typically not.

Q. Coaches react to this differently.

Will you take time to watch the Minnesota-Wisconsin game?

COACH FERENTZ: I've got to tell you, I haven't even thought about it. We got four recruits on campus. I don't know how much kicking back we'll be doing. This is college football, right (laughter)?

Last year on Saturday I relaxed. It was a nice day. We'll be working this week.

Q. You've thrown a bit on first down all year. Seems like Saturday you were throwing it deeper downfield second half. Is that just what was given you?

COACH FERENTZ: They came into the game I think 96, 98 yards a game rushing. They do that. They're really a tough, tenacious defense. Well-coached. They're making it tough on us to run the football.

The other point was we were down 13, I think it was. Again, you don't know how many possessions you're going to get against that ball club. We're looking at the scoreboard. With our situation, we figured we better start moving things a little quicker. That's kind of what played into it.

Then we started having some success with it, too. You kind of go where your success is.

Q. Did it feel like the Pittsburgh game, you got hot, it just carried through the game?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably a little different. Your memory is probably better than mine. Seemed like we were climbing a higher hill then. We got some momentum in the second half. Clearly, were doing some really good things. It was a heck of a ballgame. But we came up short.

The big thing is the team responded. That's what you hope for. It's a 60-minute game.

Q. How much was it Wisconsin switching to man to man defense?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we hurt them a little bit early in the game. I think that probably altered their thinking, if that's what got them out of as much man. They're good at whatever they do. They didn't luck into their statistics, I'll put it that way. What they got, they've earned. They're a really good football team, as is Nebraska.

Q. Everybody is probably excited to see Randy Gregory versus Brandon Scherff. How much do you think that will happen?

COACH FERENTZ: Last year it didn't happen very much at all. It's hard to predict.

They're multiple with their attack, the way they use their personnel. They're very well-coached over there. Just like us, they're looking for matchups. You never know what's going to happen.

They've got four really good players up front. They've got a good defensive line. Our guys are going to have their hands more than full.

Q. How does Jake, when it comes to handling the offense, how does he compare to the others?

COACH FERENTZ: He's really good. You project with everybody as a recruit, then certainly the quarterback position is no different. When we recruited Jake, I know Ken spent basically an entire day at the school in the spring. He was playing baseball at that time. That's one of the questions obviously you're trying to get answered. The capabilities of making adjustments. Doesn't always correlate or tie into an academic résumé. A lot of times it does.

I've been around some engineers that could build bridges but 1-2-3 in terms of progressions and stuff like that... Thank goodness they could build good bridges.

So it's not always the same thing. We thought he really had good aptitude and all that. He does have that. But, again, it's not only he has ability, but he really works at it hard.

The other part is can you do that when you get knocked around a little bit, which quarterbacks tend to get the crap knocked out of them. It's a tough position to play. That's something you don't really know until a guy gets out there and starts getting banged around physically and all the mental abuse that quarterbacks take. It's a lightning rod position. To me it takes a lot to be a really good quarterback.

Happens so fast to getting the call to reading the defense. It's not an easy job, at least the way we play. It's really a tough job. Some guys are better than others. He's really doing a nice job.

Q. Is it fair to say that his job never was in jeopardy this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't like that word 'jeopardy.' I'm not being critical. To me we have two good players there. We still think C.J. is a heck of a football player, great guy. He does a lot of that stuff, too.

We have certain positions where if we've

got to go to number two, it might be a little exciting here, whereas at that position, it's one of those rare things where we got two really good players that we have a lot of faith and confidence in.

The coaches and I, like the players, feel the same way. They see C.J. every day. The question is, how do you relay guys in and out. It's a little trickier at that spot, I guess.

Q. Do you expect to have that same comfort level next year?

COACH FERENTZ: Time will tell. Right now I'm just worried about Friday. Nice to know we got two good quarterbacks.

Q. Does winning a trophy matter to the guys?

COACH FERENTZ: It's important to us. We want them all, believe me. We lost another one Saturday, an opportunity to get one. Winning conference games are really important for us. Any trophy game. We have 12 games. They're all really critical in our minds. That's not diminishing what the trophy means. It's a lot better to have them in your building. It's what a trophy stands for. That's what's really significant about it. It could be a bucket of eggs, it really doesn't matter as long as you got it. That's the whole thing.

Q. You mentioned the Kinnick crowd. Has there been enough of those moments the last few years at Kinnick?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I'm kind of tone deaf on Saturday, I've got to be honest with you. At times I'll be cognizant of it. Home or away, you know. You have to be. You're thinking about what you're trying to get done.

But I've had a lot of people just tell me, Boy, it was great. Family members, outside people, people in our organization. You can feel it and sense it. You just can't hear it maybe, if that makes any sense.

If we're playing good football, we're playing a good football team, we've always had great fans here. So I look at it it's our job to provide the juice. That's what our job is. If we're playing good on the field, then in sports, if you're playing well, good things happen beyond it.

Q. Can you talk about the Nebraska offense a little bit.

COACH FERENTZ: First thought is their skill players. Whether you want to talk about the receivers, they've got a lot of receivers that can

hurt you. I was going to say the running back is as good as you've seen, except we've already seen a handful of guys that are really good. This is a different style. Whatever it's been this year, four or five elite running backs. Good luck picking the all-conference. He's an outstanding player, too.

The quarterback, they didn't have him last year when we played them. Big difference in what they're doing. He's really good at running their offense. Dangerous player, run and pass. They've got a big offensive line up front that does a nice job executing their stuff.

Q. Talk about Thanksgiving, what is the plan for the guys?

COACH FERENTZ: This isn't a bowl. It's like the opposite of a bowl. In a bowl you have to try to figure out how to keep everybody's focus and attention over a month. This is a shorter span.

Typically we're all eating together Christmas dinner, somewhere away from home together as a team, which is nice. We'll do that Wednesday evening. Coach Fry would love this. Today is really like Wednesday, even though it's Tuesday. He loved doing that stuff. But that's what it is. We kind of shift the schedule.

So tomorrow night we'll have a really nice Thanksgiving dinner. The Hy-Vee folks come in and do the heroes dinner, which is probably the best dinner any of us will eat during the calendar year this year. Tomorrow night will be a close second or third. Then for us Thursday is like a normal Friday. We'll do our normal deal and go.

Guys that play college football have to learn, understand, this is new in the last four or five years, whatever it's been. Your schedules are different than other people's. Basketball players, they miss all the holidays I think, other than the 4th of July. That's just part of being a college athlete. It's a small window of their lives. If you're dumb enough to get in coaching, that's just the way you live.

Thank you.

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