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An Interview With:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Start off with injuries real quickly. Needless to say, Shane DiBona, Dakota Getz and Mika'il McCall are still out. Nolan MacMillan, still going to be awhile with him before we get him back on the field.

On the good news front, B.J. Lowery will be back this week and playing with protection on his wrist. Apparently, I didn't mention this earlier, I thought I did, but Austin Vier is taking a medical. He's had several back issues through the last couple of years, so unfortunately he's not going to be able to continue. He'll take a medical. He's staying in school and doing a good job there. We're all sorry about that development needless to say.

Captains this week are the same four guys Tyler Nielson, Mike Daniels defensively; Marvin McNutt Jr. and James Vandenberg on offense.

And as I said the other day, it was a tough loss Saturday and now we have to move on and see what we can do about improving the next few days here. Northwestern is a very good football team and it starts on special teams. They do a great job on special teams. They have a couple of guys that work hard and hustle and set the tempo for them there. Defensively they have played very well against us and very consistently and then offensively, they just have a system that works extremely well for them. They execute it very well, play at a high tempo, and all 11 guys are really wired in and do a great job. The quarterback has been a phenomenal performer for them. On all three phases they do a great job of playing together and they are all wired in there and do things really well as a team.

So they have done a nice job certainly and I think if you look back at their program, going back

to the mid 90s when they really got that thing established, they have done a good job under Gary Barnett, Randy Walker, and I think Pat has put his mark on the program. Pat Fitzgerald has done a great job with the team and continue to move forward.

It's going to be a big challenge for our football team to get ready for it. We are excited to be back in Kinnick again certainly, and our fans have been absolutely fantastic and we appreciate that. Should be a great environment, too.

Q. Have you been able to pinpoint a reason or two why Northwestern has been able to have the success they have had against you the last six or seven?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm more focused on the last three I guess. For me it's pretty simple. They have played better all three games. That's kind of where it's at. You can slice it, dice it. Injuries, that's part of the game. But their quarterback was hurt in 2009, as well. At the end of the day, they played better in all three of those games and they won. Our objective this week is to play better than them.

Q. Penn State is 5th in the nation in pass defense, what did you learn from last week?

COACH FERENTZ: We probably helped them move up. I guess they moved up, or I assume they did. Probably moved up in a few categories.

So you know, it's the same thing there. They out-played us in every phase on Saturday. Played at a higher tempo and played sounder and with more toughness. When you do that, you're not going to come out on the right end of the score. And the credit goes to them.

Q. A lot of heavy scrutiny of late-half situations, Iowa State at the end of game, Penn

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State at the end of the half. Is there a certain threshold you have as far as down, distance, time, as to whether you decide to go for the kill or kind of shut it down?

COACH FERENTZ: Walk me through, what was the issue last week?

Q. Penn State, a minute and a half, you ran three times, rather than....

COACH FERENTZ: I guess I can answer that. Our thinking was try to move the ball out of there. It wasn't like we really lit the world on fire in the game at that point. If we can move it out, we are a little bit more comfortable and we take some shots. That's kind of where our thinking was there. At that point, we were down, what, 6-3. Probably lucky to be down 6-3 at that point. So I'm not so sure -- wasn't like we were tearing it up on offense at that stage.

Q. Is the thirty-yard line a threshold that you may have?

COACH FERENTZ: Game situations, at that point, it was 6-3 and I think the way we were playing, we all felt pretty fortunate to be at 6-3 at that given point. We had 80 yards to go.

Q. So first down, start passing --

COACH FERENTZ: Take a couple of shots. It wasn't a great situation to be in.

Q. So there's nothing set in stone in your thinking?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, every game's different and every situation's different, typically.

Q. Your rushing attack – tenth in the Big Ten, is the offensive line performing to the capability that you had anticipated?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they are competing pretty well. I thought they did a decent job the other day. There's a lot that's that goes into it.

If you look at sacks, there's a lot that goes into sacks. People typically put that on an offensive line, just a knee-jerk reaction, same thing in the running game. There's a lot that goes into all that stuff. It's usually a team effort, run production, sacks, those type of things and a lot of times situational, too.

Clearly, on Saturday, we didn't do anything of distinction, and you know, the first thing I would point out, I think we had five or six catchable balls

that we didn't catch. So it's just tough to get any kind of rhythm going when you're doing that.

Q. How big of a challenge does Dan Persa present to your defense?

COACH FERENTZ: Pretty big. He played as well against us last year as any quarterbacks that we have faced, if you go back 13 years, or just go back 12 years, forget about this year, but he really played excellent against us a year ago.

I would expect he's going to be ready to do the same thing this year. So it's going to be a big, big challenge for us. We have played some really, really big-time quarterbacks in the last decade. First one that comes to mind is Randall El, very different performer, different kind of quarterback than Dan Persa. But nonetheless, really tough to defend. And with a guy like Randall El, the pressure is on you every snap and I think Persa creates those same kind of problems in a different way but he really affects you in a real tough way.

We didn't have to face Drew Brees. They weren't on our rotation when he was playing, imagine he would have been a pretty big challenge, too. Persa is right up there.

Q. He seems like a little bit of a different quarterback, not running as much the last two games; is that something that you can learn from tape?

COACH FERENTZ: He may not be running north and south but he's running east, west. The Michigan game, they called me in yesterday, just walking down the hall and I got called in to see a play where he was running pretty hard to his right and threw the ball pretty hard back to his left for a sizable gain against a pretty good football team last Saturday.

So you know, he can still move and hurt you. The real danger right there is you've got a guy who can break the pocket and still throw the ball down the field. That really presents a challenge. Talking about quarterbacks, that makes me think of Seneca Wallace, he was a pretty tough quarterback, too. A tough, tough preparation. You're playing that kind of performer, real dynamic performer.

Q. You've had a lot of experience against those type of guys -- seem to move well outside of the pocket.

COACH FERENTZ: With all due respect, I

don't want to offend anybody, but Persa is really at a whole different level. If you just look at what he's done for their team, there's a real story in itself there.

Q. How much does Kolter account for what he does?

COACH FERENTZ: He can run, too. He can really run. The other day, he was a guy to throw the ball to. So they are taking advantage of his athleticism and did a really nice job filling in when he was called upon. So if they would pull Persa out, it's not like you can take a coffee break. You'd better be on your toes because he's really, really played well for them.

Just following up on that thought, you look at Persa it was his last pass last year, but just look how that impacted their football team when he came out of the game at the end of our game. That just shows you a little bit about the value a player can have to a football team. That's what great players do. Indianapolis is going through that same issue now. That's kind of what you're looking at.

Q. Can you talk about how Persa sees the game, running one way and throwing another --

COACH FERENTZ: Tough to defend. Not many guys that can do that. That's what makes him unique. I'm going to go back to Seneca Wallace in 2002, the throw he made from where our old end zone used to be, where our old locker room used to be, whatever it was, like third and 16, third and 18. And he made a throw that not many guys in the country could make on the sprint.

So when players have that ability, this makes them pretty unique and that's why Wallace is still playing. That's an unusual talent.

Q. So the America Needs Farmer's game, how do you impress upon your team what they are playing for?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we really covered that back in August when the announcement was, and you know, right now our focus is on trying to get better and see if we can't win this game, and we are all supportive of it for obvious reasons. I think I covered that back in August. I'm not worried about that, I'm in in-season mode; so we really need to be focused on this opponent.

Q. How do you prepare differently for a night game?

COACH FERENTZ: That's mental. Last week we were 3:30 so I guess we are transitioning from 11:00 to 3:30 and now we are going to 6:00. No big deal. Just get the schedule, go, that's about it.

Q. When you have players in their rooms all day, they could lay around.

COACH FERENTZ: We change our routine obviously, but it's nothing earth-shaking. We've played plenty of night games over the last decade so it's not like it's anything new to us.

Q. How did James react after last week?

COACH FERENTZ: James?

Q. James -- Vandenberg.

COACH FERENTZ: We have three James, especially when they are all up the middle, too.

I haven't talked to James much. I saw him Sunday. Saw him briefly yesterday. He's like all of the players, any time you lose, it hurts. You reflect, and on Monday, you move on and I assume that's where he's at. He's a good leader and I'm sure he's doing more than just getting back on his feet. I'm sure he's working with the other guys, too.

Q. What do you see from Northwestern defensively? They are last in the Big Ten in total defense.

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I see a team that plays hard and plays smart, they have an identity and they have an identity in all three areas, and that's important. I think when Mike Hankowitz got hired on there, he really stabilized. Prior to that, there was a little bit of year-to-year, changed a little bit. But he's given them an identity.

All I know is against us, they have made it very tough on us. They have played well and that's kind of what I'm focused on right now, and just what they are doing. We don't have a quarterback that resembles what they played Saturday. So you take that out of the equation, and our quarterback looks a lot different than the guy they played the week before. Football is a game of matchups, so it's a little bit different.

Q. What's Lowery going to add?

COACH FERENTZ: Depth, hopefully, to start with. He hasn't practiced in pads now since August. And he was practicing well. He did a good job in the spring and so that's good news. But the reality is, he has not practiced with the pads on or a helmet on basically two months.

So at least it's a start back and we can get him going and get him back with the football team and maybe he can help us out depth-wise, that type of thing and we'll just keep bringing him along.

Q. Hyde had another interception on Saturday. He seems to have a nose for the ball more this year; is that something new for him?

COACH FERENTZ: He did a pretty good job last year, too, a couple of big picks, bowl game, Michigan State. I think he had more than that but those are the two that come to mind. He continues to play well, and he's a good football player, good leader and brings energy to the field out there.

Q. Seemed like Marcus Coker took the loss pretty hard. Are you having trouble keeping his spirits up?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, I think all of our players took the loss hard. Or at least I hope they did. I think they did. That was my sense. All I can do is just judge from what I see. I don't know if he took it harder than anybody. It was hard for all of us. We are all adults and we are all young people, at least, and that's part of the deal. You go out on the field, there are no guarantees, especially when you play a good football team. He'll move on just like all of us will move on. He played fine. He did okay.

Q. You talk about being a developmental program. What are some of the obstacles in that situation?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, most teams are developmental. Not all of them but most of them. Alabama, probably not. Oklahoma, probably not. But most teams are to some degree doing that. A lot of factors play in.

So it's like anything else, it's a race against time, how quickly can you move on if you don't have a lot of experienced players, how can you get that experience and get guys to react in a good way when situations pop up.

So it's an ongoing process and as you know, there's a lot of variables that take place during the course of the season, and that's the deal.

Q. Is it making the margin for -- I don't know if mental error is the right word, less margin for error?

COACH FERENTZ: Really, probably the last. We hit a stride in 2002 after the second half at Ann Arbor. Things kind of fell in place for us and that turned into one of those deals where we took off.

But really outside of that, that's really kind of the way our seasons have gone. We have had a couple big wins and we've had a couple bad losses, too. But for the most part, it's pretty closely contested, and the team that does the best with the opportunities that are in front of them is usually the team that wins.

That's the challenge that's out there. It really has not changed a heck of a lot. I think we got through the 2000 season. We won in State College in 2000 and since that time, at least we've had a chance out there to be in the game. Not always, but in general terms.

Q. Does it make it really difficult to have that 2002 to 2004 run, seemed like the developing just kept going on there.

COACH FERENTZ: There was nothing pretty about 2002, 2003 or 2004. For the record, we ended up eighth in the country both years. But I don't think anybody was putting any -- whatever, tenth in rushing the ball, we were 116th or 115th in '04, and we were hardly an offensive juggernaut in '03. At times we were but in general terms, no.

And that's the nature of our program. And most teams are like that. There are a few teams that maybe have a different situation, but that's the fun of football and that's the challenge of football, how can you handle that situation.

These guys have done a great job with it. I think that that sometimes there's a perception in this state that we are still playing the Northwestern teams from '85, one of those deals, or 2002, and they did have a down year in 2002. They were pretty good in 2000.

But the record is, last year, both of us came out of the game 7-3. They lost their quarterback so didn't turn out well for them after that. But we were pretty even last year.

The year before that, they finished up 8-4, lost to Auburn by three points I think in the Outback Bowl who went on to win the National Championship the next year. You could say Auburn was developmental that year, and the year

before that, I think they were 9-3 at the end of the year and lost to Missouri in overtime by a touchdown in a bowl game. These guys have played well the last three years, and that's the nature of college football; what can you do with what you've got. We have all got the same amount of time. That's kind of the challenge.

Q. A season like this, obviously there's outside expectations but for you, you see three defensive linemen with the NFL -- you look at the new faces that are out there, does that cause you to pause and say, what do I have here?

COACH FERENTZ: That's every year. That's coaching. I think we all learned last year, expectations are not always right. I think we learned that in 2002 as well. Everybody tries to predict the outcome and I understand that's the way all of us live, not just in sports but sports especially. That's why you play games. That's why you play seasons.

And I don't remember, nobody picked Auburn and Oregon last year going into it, right. That's why people go to games I think and that's why they pay attention and what have you. And with all due respect, experts are not always correct. And how can you be? So many things that happen.

Going off on a tangent here, but just the effect the quarterback had on Auburn a year ago, pretty significant. The guy (Brad Banks), what he did for us in 2002, pretty significant. You see examples of that all the time. You know, that's part of college football. That's what makes it kind of interesting and fun.

Q. Bo wend off on a reporter the other night, others have as well...

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not aware. The second one I'm aware of.

Q. Other coaches have gone off and you publically for the most part have stayed pretty calm. Do you have trouble with that?

COACH FERENTZ: No, that's my job. I don't know what I would go off about.

Q. Curious to how you stay so cool.

COACH FERENTZ: Just, I'm not sure what good it would do. Everybody's got a job to do and I appreciate that. Probably said this before, but I developed a motto. One thing I learned when I became a head coach at Maine. I told my wife

one night shortly into the adventure, "If I ever come home and say I'm surprised by something, just hit me with a bat."

I read the papers and I listen to shows, not just locally but nationally and I hear things that I think are a little interesting all the time. It's part of job.

Q. You talk about being developmental, does that develop into peaks and valleys and results?

COACH FERENTZ: You guys make the conclusions on that. I've said this before, I think if you look at college football, there are a handful of teams that have great population bases, great resources. Look at stadiums -- common sensical things that I think -- and it really has not changed much over 30 years, 40 years, probably longer than that, what schools those are.

So obviously they start on the inside track and there's others that start way on the outside and there's some in the middle, and that stuff fluctuates year-to-year. But there are some teams inside that lane each and every year. But to that point, not that I follow stuff that close, but the top three payrolls in baseball are not playing right now.

What's neat about sports is there's no guarantee. Those teams over the long haul, they certainly win more games. I think Philly was second in payroll, might have been third but they won the most games this year as I understand it. But that's what is cool about sports, nobody knows -- as much as we all want to say, this is going to happen, you just never know and that's what I think makes sports interesting.

And in college more so than pros. Although pro baseball is a great example. Milwaukee is not a big market team by any stretch, nor is St. Louis. They are good baseball towns but they don't have the power the Yankees have.

Q. We have had this conversation in the past, what is Iowa on the Major League --

COACH FERENTZ: It depends on the year. Probably going to always be that way for a long time. Flip it around, too. One point back 60 years ago, Penn State's stadium was nothing to write home about. And just look at their stadium evolution in the last 40 years. It's pretty interesting. There's a powerful statement there. But I ain't going to be here in 40 years, I know that.

Q. The transition in the locker room --

COACH FERENTZ: Actually they dressed it up, yeah. It was nice, yeah. Okay, sounds like we are getting to the end.

Q. Can Iowa get to that point? Can it be an Alabama? Can it be a Penn State? Or is it inherently with the population?

COACH FERENTZ: Population helps. It's not everything. Nebraska doesn't have a Nebraska State to compete with or a Northern Nebraska.

You guys know this stuff better than I do for crying out loud. You have got more time to look at that stuff. You can do the research. It's a good project to work on. So anyway; I'm worried about this Saturday. Okay.

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