

December 7, 2014



An Interview With:

**COACH KIRK FERENTZ
GARY BARTA**

GARY BARTA: We just got off the phone with the chairman of the TaxSlayer Bowl and the executive director.

And you might imagine that they invited and we accepted quickly on behalf of President Mason, who is still traveling back from Big Ten meetings at Indianapolis.

It's a thrill for us to go to a Bowl, the 70th annual TaxSlayer Bowl; one of the bowls that has great history and tradition. Kirk can tell you because he played in it when it was the Gator Bowl.

And it's one of those things, especially in today's world, where we're talking a lot these days about student-athlete well-being. And I can tell you as someone who has had the opportunity to be at a lot of bowls. This is a great opportunity for our students, for our seniors to have another opportunity to go out and play and play against a historic program.

COACH FERENTZ: We're thrilled to get the invitation to play in the TaxSlayer Bowl. And it's exciting for all of us, certainly. We're looking forward to an opportunity to line up and play again.

More importantly, to be together another for three-plus weeks as we get ready for the game. We're so thrilled to be going to Jacksonville; appreciative of everybody involved in the game down there, Vince McCormack, Andy Pradella and Rick Catlett, for believing in our team and our program and excited to match up with a SEC team. Tennessee is a team on the rise certainly that's recruited very well the last several years under

new coach Butch Jones, who has done a great job in other programs (Central Michigan, Cincinnati).

So it's a game we're very excited about and honored, first of all, and then secondly thrilled to be involved in the postseason.

Q. This is a different process than one that's been done ever before. Can you talk through that a little bit. Was it a week ago where you had to submit three bowls you wanted to go to and what was the day like as far as conversation between the Big Ten and the other bowls?

GARY BARTA: I liken it a bit of a throwback, how it used to be. Rick told the story a little bit earlier that he and I talked to each other around September 1st. And I jokingly said, you know, where can I sign up, and going to a bowl used to be about constant conversations all year and then finding the best matchup.

So that's sort of how it's reverted. The idea of submitting three names, I don't know where that took off or that idea came up. That really wasn't how it was. What it was like, though, is talking to all the bowls. I spent the last two or three weeks especially talking to all the bowls and then narrowing it down in the last week or so to who I thought it was most likely we might end up.

About two weeks ago, Rick Catlett, from that day forward, was consistent in saying he wanted the University of Iowa. He loves our tradition, our history, our fan base, and Kirk's track record at bowls, etc.

So from day one he said he wanted Iowa. And fortunately today we got the invitation.

Q. Kirk, what do you know about Tennessee?

COACH FERENTZ: Very little, other than I know Coach Jones has been there a couple of years, and I know they recruited very well. They've hit that right off the bat the first recruiting season.

And so we're going to play a team. I glanced at their schedule, looked at scores and that will be more meaningful once we look at tape. But you're playing an SEC opponent. I know they've got good talent and great tradition. They have a great fan following as well. To me, it ought to be a great matchup.

Q. What did you think of the overall process today?

GARY BARTA: Well, it was new, so we all were wondering how it would work out.

But, we were given the opportunity to talk to the bowls, all the bowls, as athletic directors. We did it over the last couple of weeks. And the last couple of days -- obviously I was staying in touch with the Big Ten as well during that process.

In the last couple of days it really started to narrow down, but it wasn't until last night and yesterday afternoon when, through the championships, we started to get a clearer picture.

And it truly wasn't until late this afternoon that I had an absolute idea of where we were headed. So I was talking with representatives of the Big Ten, whether it was Jim or Mark Rudner, and so having those conversations. And I narrowed it down to about two bowls earlier this morning.

But I felt confident that if other bowls selected the way they said they were going to select, that we'd end up going to the TaxSlayer Bowl. As I mentioned, it was sort of like days passed where there would be all these conversations and the bowls would select and you would accept.

I think there was a little bit of a misnomer that there was going to be a process where we all submitted names, the bowl submitted names, and then Commissioner Delany or somebody from the Big Ten office was going to move puzzle pieces around. And that's really not how it occurred.

Q. Break down the process of film, practice, how you pace yourself over the next month?

COACH FERENTZ: The good news is a couple of friends said I'm thrilled to be playing in January. And then January 2nd for several reasons. It's a great opportunity for both teams to be on national TV.

The other thing, it takes a little pressure off us in terms of preparation. And I don't know how many schools have finals a week after this week, but I know a lot of schools have finals this week,

which makes bowl preparation a lot easier. It's one of the challenges we face because we try to leave our guys go during that period for obvious reasons.

The other nice part is it gives us a chance to go hit the road recruiting this week. We'll concentrate on that. And have more than ample time to get ready. That won't be an excuse not having enough time to watch film and tape, that type of deal. So we'll hit that during week the guys are in finals and start coming together after that weekend and start moving forward.

But you can over-prepare, too, and that's a mistake we don't want to make getting ready for the bowl game.

Q. Of the practices you get, how many practices do you get 20?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure there's a rule. I keep hearing numbers getting thrown around, but I don't hear about a rule being involved.

Q. The practice to prepare your team, but to work on guys going into the spring --

COACH FERENTZ: It's huge. It's two-fold. I can go back and think about Allen Reisner and Mike Daniels, players that have played before going along with their careers and they start emerging in December during that practice period and players develop at different rates certainly. It's an opportunity for everybody to get coached and learn our system better, get better fundamentally, that type of thing.

And there are a lot of different ways to grow as a football player but one of the best ways obviously is to be on the football field practicing football and that gives us an opportunity to do that. That's a huge advantage. Something we're looking forward to.

But right along with that there are a lot of other things, too, we're trying to get done and at some point our attention is going to turn strictly to getting ready for the game.

But we've already hit the field twice. All we're trying to do right now is keep our guys moving, keep them in a football routine if you will and then we'll pick it up again here at the end of this week.



visit our archives at asapsports.com

K Ferentz G Barta - 12 07 14

Q. Talk about Tennessee and what they run, what has been Jones' history?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know specifically. I'd be talking out of school. But I know Central Michigan, they were up tempo, more spread type offense football team. Cincinnati a little bit the same. I don't know what they're doing at Tennessee. I've not seen them on tape. We haven't overlapped at all.

And really don't know much. So that's something we'll learn a lot more of here in the days ahead and certainly in the weeks ahead.

One thing I do know he's had great success everywhere he's been. He's got good coaches. Steve Stripling, one of the guys on the staff, was in the Big Ten when I got here 16 years ago. He's a tremendous football coach. I'm guessing they've got nothing but quality people there. And again I know they've recruited very well on top of it. We'll have our hands full like every week I'm sure.

Q. Gary talked about 7-5 being unacceptable. What are your thoughts on that now?

COACH FERENTZ: Every year is different. I won't comment on the last two weeks. Simple as that. We just got done doing our team banquet. I'm not sure unacceptable would be the word I would use. We're disappointed, certainly, with the outcome of the last two ball games.

It's interesting, if you look over the last two years, we were 7-3 after 10 games this year. And 6-4 after last year, with the difference winning the last two ball games. There's a real feeling of momentum, euphoria, whatever it may be.

And this year we lost probably in my opinion we played our best football in a losing effort two weeks ago against I think a very good Wisconsin football team and came up short in overtime against the team that won nine ball games eight days ago, whatever it was nine days ago. It's a totally different feeling and I would say we're all extremely disappointed we didn't win either of those games or both of them.

But you can't move backwards. And so if there's any feeling or talk of us not being affected by it. That's ridiculous. Anybody that's ever competed, I think, would understand we're disappointed. And we want to do better. And that's go be our goal. And that's our goal. Now we have three plus weeks to get better as a football team and try to line up and play our best football. That will be our game this coming game. That will be

our goal every game moving forward as it has been for 16 years.

Q. Emphasis on the outcome of this game because as you say you lost two to get some momentum going?

COACH FERENTZ: Momentum is a great thing. Winning is a great thing, creates momentum. But I've been here 16 years. I haven't talked an awful lot about winning -- obviously we talk about it. But I think these guys are smart. They're in college.

And I'm not sure -- I don't mean to say this in a professorial way. But these guys invest an awful lot, players invest a lot in terms of time and sacrifice, et cetera. Endure injury. They go through an awful lot. Think about the average career of a college football player. And it's not unique to our program. It's just part of being a Division I athlete.

So to suggest that winning is not important that would be almost insulting if you said that to any player or coach. But to that point the focus we've always tried to do, our emphasis is on being let's maximize what we have and play our best, and that's a tough goal to reach.

So wins and losses don't always measure that, but that's the ultimate goal and that's going to be our goal this next three plus weeks is to practice as well as we can and then go out and compete as well as we can against Tennessee and it's never easy. It's a competitive endeavor. But that's our goal is to do the best we can.

Q. Do you feel like you got enough out of your quarterback this year? Do you anticipate any kind of reevaluation of that position either for the Bowl game or going forward?

COACH FERENTZ: I'll say this about every position. We sit here at 7-5 right now. I can't imagine there's too much that we won't evaluate or too much that's not open for grabs.

And it's been that way all season. It will be that way certainly over the next month. Everybody has to earn their spot in their position, their playing time, and I don't see that changing. But the thing that has changed now we've got three plus weeks and a lot more practices than you would have in a game week to make some evaluations.

But the three captains you'll visit with tonight, my guess is they'll all line up and start in the Bowl game. I'd be surprised if they didn't.

But, hey, we're a 7-5 football team. We're looking to get better and that leaves everything open for discussion and most importantly open to competition.

Q. Would you say that C.J. Beathard is open to upward mobility?

COACH FERENTZ: I said, for the most part, everybody's positions are up. And we'll see how this month transpires.

Q. Have you started evaluating your staff?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean probably started the day I hired any of them. Any of them -- some have been here 16 plus years. Some less than a couple of years. Seth got here in this spring. Yeah, so that's an ongoing process just like it is player evaluation.

Q. Started evaluating coming back next season?

COACH FERENTZ: Ongoing process. I evaluate day by day.

Q. What about the move into this building and how did that go and what's your opinion of it?

COACH FERENTZ: The move -- the moves never go easily. Happy to say I haven't made too many of them career-wise, which is great. Personal or building.

This is I think my fourth or fifth office since I've been in Iowa starting in the old fieldhouse back in '81. But it's exciting for all of us. I think it's most exciting for our players.

Funny, you talk to the guys. We've worked the last couple of days and just to get their input, talking to Mark Weisman, who unfortunately can't be with us tonight. It's only a month for him. And he'll train here in the springtime. But he's thrilled to be here.

It's a big deal. It's a really big deal for the student-athletes. That's the number one reason to have it. The impact I think it has potentially for our program. I can't put a price tag on that. It's something we needed. It's something a lot of people have worked extremely hard to make become a reality.

And I can't say thank you enough, whether it be our lead donors, the people who have really got the ball rolling or people that contributed what might be kind of considered smaller amounts. Everything -- the teamwork involved has just been

fantastic and it's. You talk to the pro people that get out and see places, they're all here for Pro Day last march and they said you guys are way behind. So that's my exposure to what's going on. So we're really excited about that.

Q. How do you measure momentum from Bowl victory into the next --

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if you can quantify it. But it's no different than what I just talked about. We finished with two losses so the negativity right now that I assume is out there public-wise I know how it felt for me all week and I'm sure it felt the same way for every one of our coaches and players, we worked hard and we are disappointed. And conversely, when you finish like last year with two wins that was a whole different mindset.

But you know if you compete, that's going to be part of it. You're going to have to deal with the good and bad and you'll have to find a way to make the bad good. And if you do something good, then you have to find a way to get back grounded and try to make the next thing a good thing, too.

I can tell you from experience winning Bowl games is a positive for everybody. And it doesn't hurt the opportunity for next year.

But there's no guarantee even if you win a Bowl game you'll have a successful year the next year. It's a new chapter. But there's not a lot of downside to winning any game. That's for sure.

Q. I think everybody can appreciate the situation we're in, Derrick Willies situation came up, pretty good game coming up. Now that you've had a week, a little over a week since the season is over with, had any conversation with him? Does he have a potential future with the program?

COACH FERENTZ: I've had conversation with him and I'll let that remain private. But I've got an open mind to anything. And Derrick is a good young man from my vantage point. I think he's done a great job academically. His conduct and citizenship to my knowledge has been outstanding.

So there are no issues there. He made a choice whenever that was. And that was a choice a young person made. So I've got an open mind. We'll probably revisit that when the season concludes.

Q. You mentioned a job and you've been lucky to stay a long time, 16 years. When you look at what happened to Bo and Brady and this day and age the career field, do you feel out of the hot seat, per se, or do you feel pretty comfortable where you're at now?

COACH FERENTZ: As a coach I've never felt comfortable. That's a word I choose not to use. Because what we do is competitive. I don't know how you can get comfortable.

It would to me suggest that you feel like you might have arrived. You never arrive at anything in life, if you're trying to improve. So that's not a word I would use. But the hot seat stuff, I got over that when I coached in the NFL. Every day is a hot seat in the National Football League. And I was an assistant. Wasn't like I was on the front line.

That's the nature of coaching. Certainly the nature of what we do. And there's more than ample evidence that coaches get taken out of their positions on a routine basis. And every circumstance is different, but that's why you have a contract.

I got my first contract at the University of Maine back in 1990, I guess it would have been. I think it had about a \$60,000 buyout. Kevin White made me have that in there. Dropped down to about 15,000 in the second year.

And I've never worried about that. I worry about the best I can do and that's been my concentration and focus ever since I got going here.

Q. Kirk, what was your evaluation of what Sean Eichorst had to say in the press conference regarding Bo Pelini when he said he had to evaluate where Nebraska is and not Iowa, did you take it as a slight or what did you think of what he had to say regarding Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: He's talking about a team that was 7 and 5 they just beat. We're 7 and 5 this year. I have no problem with those comments. The record is the record.

Q. Gary came out the last few days, gave you a vote of confidence. How do you kind of view that? Is it odd to you that you need that after what you've done here? Is it a positive? How do you view it?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, I appreciate it. And more importantly, Gary and I meet regularly, especially during the season, we meet weekly. And we meet frequently throughout

the calendar year. I've never felt anything but supported since I've been here.

We've had some tough times here. Record-wise. All that stuff. So again I feel very fortunate. I've said that many times for a lot of reasons on a personal level, professional level. And we just had our banquet. The main reason I feel good about being here, this is 25 years worth of experience now, had the opportunity to work with great people be it our coaching staff, players, support staff, just a lot of good people. And you can't say that everywhere you've been.

So I appreciate that. But more importantly I appreciate the day to day that I have and it's all part of the fabric here. And what we do, the reality of what we do if you don't win enough at some point you'll be asked to leave. I get that and I got that a long time ago. I've never worried too much about that.

We're worried about trying to get better. That's what we're trying to focus on.

Q. Do you concern yourself at all with public opinion or have you talked about the negativity that might be out there for not winning more games?

COACH FERENTZ: When you lose two straight, I would imagine just again, as I said, last year we won two straight and there's a real different sense of things. That's how it works. That's how it works in sports. It was that way 50 years ago, let alone two years ago.

So that all comes and goes with the territory. And you can't worry about that. What you have to worry about is what you can do to improve the team, the program, etc. And that's my job. That's what I do.

Q. Has the honor of qualifying for a bowl game, has it changed a lot over the 16 years? Illinois got back-doored into it. Has it changed over the years, I guess kind of the --

COACH FERENTZ: I could draw the same analogy. We were 6 and 5, got a bid to the Alamo Bowl. And Gary was talking about the process back then. Back then it was a wild process because we thought we were locked into a bowl in California, found out I believe it was on Friday not so fast, that somebody else had kind of back-doored us a little bit.

On that Friday, looked like we may be sitting at home with a 6 and 5 record. Penn State

got upset by Virginia the next day and hence we got a bid to go to the Alamo Bowl. It was very exciting.

I think it's one of the beauties of the bowl system. To your larger point, we didn't go to a bowl two years ago and we didn't go to a bowl in '07. We were 6 and 6. People that take things for granted, which happens all the time in life, to me are missing the boat.

We're very appreciative. And I'll tell you we would have been appreciative going to any bowl this year and having a chance to play anybody. That's what you're competing for and hoping to do.

So I'm thrilled to be going to Jacksonville and very thrilled they had faith in us and are rewarding us with a great opportunity.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports