

November 23, 2010



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Happy Thanksgiving prematurely. Try to get moving so everybody can go enjoy their turkey.

Obviously, it was a tough loss Saturday. As I said after the game, very disappointing, and a hard-fought game between two teams competing really hard. So we have to move on just like always and get ready for the next game.

Our captains will be the same as last week. We've got Adrian, Karl, Brett Greenwood, and Ricky Stanzi will be our captains. And injury wise, Adam Robinson is the only guy that got injured in the game and will not be playing. So I think our guys will be ready. Most of them will practice today and go from there.

Minnesota real quickly, if you look at the last three games, we've had two very, very tough competitive games with them, and throughout the series it's been hard fought. So we expect the same thing this week.

Certainly we're playing for Floyd of Rosedale. It's a trophy game that's important. Learned about that back in 1981, we got a rude welcoming from them. They came down here and beat us and came across the field and took the trophy with them. So it's an important game, like all games. A conference game on the road is going to be a tough challenge for us.

Offensively the first thing about them that stands out certainly is their quarterback. He's had a tremendous career up there. He's been playing a long time and playing well for a long time. Just became one of the fifth, I guess, fifth quarterbacks in Big Ten history to go over 10,000 yards. I think that speaks volumes about his performance and the way he's been able to play for quite some time.

Defensively they're playing hard. They've got good size on both lines, both sides of the ball. And special teams wise they've got the best kick returner in the conference. There are a lot of good ones, but he's been good for three years now. Excellent player, so that will be a challenge for us as well.

So we'll start our preparation today and make sure we've all got warm clothes and get ready to go for Saturday.

Q. I know obviously the only other time you've had to deal with a game over Thanksgiving weekend was Iowa State, and that wasn't premeditated whereas this one was planned in advance. So how do you change your approach or if you change your approach at all knowing that you have that holiday during the week as far as preparations?

COACH FERENTZ: There are positives in everything, right. We found a couple. One nice thing is we're able to -- one of the reasons we're going to rush today a little bit is we're actually starting at a normal time. We'll be on the field more in the 3:30 area. In a perfect world that's when you'd like to practice, or I would.

As far as I know we're not working around any class conflicts this week or exam conflicts. You know, we could find out differently today. But the university is supposed to be shut down, so I think that's one nice thing. At least we have that benefit.

The way it's worked out, our team's done a great job. Originally thought we'd do a team meal on Thursday, but all the guys that are on the traveling roster have been absorbed by guys that live locally. So I think the team's done a great job that way.

So it's not like we'll have anybody that's going to be wandering around on Thursday. We won't have to do a team function. Those are fine at bowls, but at Thanksgiving it's kind of better to

be at someone's home.

Q. You mentioned no classes. Did you get a sense that the guys this week might be more focused on football because they don't have class commitments to deal with?

COACH FERENTZ: I really haven't seen them yet. I told them they're like pro football players this week. That could be good or bad. They've got a lot of time to deal with. Fortunately, none of them have the money pro football players do, so they can only go so far.

But they do have a chance to relax a little bit and rest. Hopefully spend a little more time on the game plan. Maybe come in and watch some film on their own, that type of thing. But we haven't been together since Sunday, so we'll know more as we go along. I think they'll enjoy practicing and getting off the field a little bit earlier. Just having more time in the evening, too.

Q. Are you opposed -- to playing after Thanksgiving, if I'm correct. Do you still have strong feelings about that, and if so, why?

COACH FERENTZ: Now that we're doing it, I love it. I love whatever I'm told to do. But the down side of it all, two down sides. This is a week we're normally everybody gets out of dodge for a week and they just get away from campus, get away from football. Get a chance to really, truly recharge and regenerate a little bit.

I think being with family is still an American value. Kind of makes it a little bit tougher for a lot of guys. We'll have a lot of guys displaced on Thursday.

But they'll do something they normally wouldn't do, which is share some fellowship with someone else, and that's not bad. Again, the nice thing is we're able to practice a little bit more preferable hour.

Then flipping it around, I think the only big thing we have to do is just be cognizant of what we do with our guys and ask of them in the weeks ahead. I think we've got a decent plan in place right now to give them some time away from us. I can't excuse them from school next week, but at least they can have some downtime football-wise.

Q. How is Adam doing?

COACH FERENTZ: He's fine.

Q. Do you expect him to play in a bowl game?

COACH FERENTZ: I would assume so. We have five, six weeks until then, so I would assume he'd be fine, but he's doing fine.

Q. The hit, you've looked at it now I assume. Is it a big deal for you?

COACH FERENTZ: It is a good football play. The only thing in question was it pass interference or not? I've got an opinion on that. But it was a bang-bang play. You can look at it and make up your own mind on that.

But as far as the legality of the hit, I don't think anybody in our camp has an issue. If we do, I haven't heard from anyone. But football is a tough, aggressive game. Those things are going to happen.

Q. If anyone would have told you during the summer that you would have been down to Marcus Coker who had a broken clavicle and your linebacker corps shredded after losing players to the NFL, would you be surprised with where you are record-wise?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if I'd be surprised or not surprised. But those are -- I've mentioned back in August and I think I say it every year, there are things that are going to happen during the course of the season that you can't predict.

You know things are going to happen, you just don't know what they are, so you have to deal with them as they arise. Murphy's Law says that injuries at least tend to go to a couple of positions.

And I don't mind telling you I had an ominous feeling when Marcus fractured his collarbone. Just somehow, some way I thought that was going to impact us a little bit, and it did.

Coaches, maybe not all coaches, I tend to always think the worst. Got that black cloud on my head on certain things. But those are things that happen in the course of the season. And you just have to deal with it, and do the best you can.

Q. In the first quarter with Adam out, did he make any headway to where you guys would have thought about using him more in the second or third quarter?

COACH FERENTZ: I think every player whether they're building credit or spending on a credit card, you know, going in the red with everything they do performance-wise, practice and games. With every exposure we've had to Marcus,

which has been fairly limited, every exposure has been impressive.

The defense we played the other night was a tenacious, fast-closing defense and a hard-hitting defense. So to see him perform really keep that in that environment, I thought that was awfully impressive. Really, he's building and gaining our confidence. I would assume he's probably becoming more confident himself individually too. He should feel good about what he did.

Q. Can you pinpoint your defense's success against Minnesota the last couple years? You've been able to kind of keep them out of the end zone. Anything in particular?

COACH FERENTZ: We've played well. Two of those three years we were really fortunate, because we couldn't put the ball in the end zone last year. Three years ago it was really a struggle as well. We didn't move the ball well that day.

It's a good thing that we have been able to do that. Hopefully we'll see that this week too. But it won't be easy. The quarterback's a good player. They've got a lot of guys that are talented and good receivers, and solid backs. It will be a challenge.

Q. With two back-to-back disappointing close losses, do you have any concerns about the team's mindset going into the finale against a team that on paper, what you've done in the last couple of years, they've had a lot of success, you've had a lot of success against?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I guess I'd have concerns either way. If we were coming off two big, you know, euphoric-type wins, I'd be concerned probably the other direction. So it's like in any game. You always have challenges going into a game and things you're concerned about. You know, the mental state of the team is always an issue that you think about and try to do your best to manage.

But circumstances change, but you're always trying to anticipate how the team's thinking and what things you might have to cover.

Q. Fourth quarter defense, you know, I think the stat is 14-26 on third and fourth down. That is probably what you're going to say is you've got to get off the field. Is it as simple as that?

COACH FERENTZ: Throw in there that our fourth quarter offense hasn't been good enough in those cases. The two things

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compliment each other. If you can move the ball, drive the ball if you've got the lead, you know, can sustain and score points would be the best thing.

But at least if you can move the ball a little bit and give the defense a chance to rest and get them back out and in good field position, sometimes that hasn't been the issue.

But those things all -- it's football. It all goes together. It all ties in there. But we have to do a better job. There's no question. I think in our losses, everything is pretty graphically spelled out where the issues are, where the concerns are. And the challenge for us this week is to try to remedy those things as best we can.

Q. Did you guys do anything different going to the stadium for the first time that you've never seen?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll go up there Friday and just take a walk through. Looking at the weather report, it looks like it will be a quick exposure. Hopefully we'll be well covered when we go up there.

Q. Are you going to practice outside?

COACH FERENTZ: This week? Yeah. We'll plan on it. What I've been told is today's the best day of three. So we'll probably go out today. The next two days are terrible. But we plan on going out today and enjoying some fresh air.

Q. What was your first reaction to old time Minnesota weather up there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I've heard Carl Jackson give a couple of accounts of -- is it Memorial Stadium? I think the last trip Iowa had out there, '79, '80. Was a little chilly, if I remember.

Carl wasn't a big fan of cool weather anyway. So I remember he enjoyed the Dome, I remember that. He was a huge fan of the Metrodome.

Q. Did you ever enjoy the Metrodome?

COACH FERENTZ: When we won I thought it was great. When we lost, I hated it. Like everything.

Q. You never coached a game outdoors in Minnesota then in your tenure as joining as an assistant?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm pretty sure not. In the NFL too we were indoors. Yeah. I remember

going up there in December of whatever year it was. I think they might have had -- oh, you can look it up -- I think 20,000 fans showed up. There were 30,000 no shows.

It was one of those days when you walked from the hotel to the bus your nostrils froze. It was one of those freeze dry moments. It was so bad, nobody went to the game. I can't remember how the game turned out. I don't know. It doesn't matter.

Q. You coached 12 years and you were an assistant for nine before that. Minnesota for the most part has been the season finale game, now it's not going to be after this year. Do you have any thoughts on that?

COACH FERENTZ: Since we're playing outdoors I think it's probably good they moved it. We finally caught a break on scheduling.

Q. (No microphone)?

COACH FERENTZ: Couple of degrees, maybe. I don't know. We'll see. I'm sitting here thinking about the Big 12 Championship game they played a couple years ago in Kansas City. Remember that one? That was awful.

I can't remember who was in the game, I just remember everybody was freezing. But that's football in the winter time.

It's really not bad for coaches and players, I've never understood why fans go. Coaches and players are working. It's not that big a deal. Would I go to one of those games? I don't think so.

Q. Coach, teams say that Alabama-Auburn ends the season. Do you feel like you've built that with Minnesota. There is a certain tradition there and now it's going to Nebraska.

COACH FERENTZ: When I got here we were playing in October, so, yeah. I'm pretty sure '82 was in October. I know '83 was at the end of the season, so I think that's when it started.

It made sense, but, again, with the expansion a lot of things have made sense aren't necessarily connecting anymore. So it's just part of the deal.

Q. Fourth quarter issues like last year, there seemed to be a confidence that the team had that they'd get the job done in the fourth quarter when they blocked field goals. Was it a matter of confidence that you'd make a play early in the season in the fourth quarter?

COACH FERENTZ: There's no question that helps. It comes down to execution, and I think teams develop confidence. I'm not saying we have doubt right now, I don't think that's the issue, but you do develop confidence.

But you still have to execute when you get into those situations. At the end of the day, that is one of the differences between winning and losing.

We did some things well the other day. Our turnover margin was great. We ended up winning that. And the game was really up until the last possessions, their last drive in particular, the game was just about even statistically outside of the turnovers.

But, you know, if you don't finish, you've got to play four quarters. If you don't finish, that is the difficulties between being in a BCS game and not. Kind of like the NFL players. Lot of close games in the playoffs.

Teams that win those close games, if you want to go to the Super Bowl, that's what you have to do. So you either win and move on or you don't.

Q. What is your schedule Thursday for the staff and your team?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll just slide things up. In a perfect world, which I mean we all know better than that, but we should be off the field 12:30, 12:45, somewhere in that ballpark. So that will give everybody a chance to get out of here without, hopefully, driving 90 miles an hour on two wheels.

Hopefully they'll take a sane approach, get home safely and travel back here safely. Friday morning they'll have ample time to get here. We're not flying out until mid-afternoon, so we have comfortable room at both ends to get where they're going.

Q. Are you at all concerned about any of the guys overeating on Thursday and being a little sluggish come game time?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I hadn't thought about that. I hadn't thought about that. Other than guys eat pretty well any time. Our guys burn a lot of calories, so I'm not overly worried about that. But it's possible, I guess. Talking about coaches or players? Okay.

Q. What do you remember in the Minnesota game a couple years ago? It just got out of hand a little bit for them?

COACH FERENTZ: It was an aberration, yeah. Just one of those deals. It's fun if you're on the right end of one of those. No fun if you're on the other end. Sometimes it happens. I think I said back then I sure didn't see it coming.

But usually turnovers get involved in kicking games and those types of deals ask scores like that. It's one of those things. But that's not typical of this series.

Q. Looking at your running back situation on Saturday. The running back who's proven himself in Adam Robinson, and the one with a lot of potential in Jewel Hampton. Marcus Coker has done a good job in the couple games here. How do you see it shaking out? Does Brandon Wegher figure into the situation at all?

COACH FERENTZ: We spent so much time in the off-season worrying about how it was all going to shake out. It's a lot of wasted talk. So I'm not too worried about it right now. We'll go into spring ball, let everybody compete and go from there.

I think Adam's demonstrated he's a good player this year. I think Marcus is showing potential. I can just tell you Jewel's rehab is going very, very well.

We had a meeting. We'll see where everybody's at in the spring. Jewel will not be practicing in the spring, I know that. So we'll let Adam and Marcus get work and go from there.

Q. Can you run through -- I hate to ask this. But do you run through disaster scenarios anymore? As early as March for running backs at this point?

COACH FERENTZ: Are we talking about disasters this year or next year?

Q. Because it seems like it's happened.

COACH FERENTZ: Right now I'm just worried about Saturday. I'm trying to think about all the disaster scenarios for this Saturday and see what we've got to go with, so that's kind of where I'm at right now.

But, disaster scenarios are part of coaching. You've got to have one of those for everything.

Q. Emotionally how do you go into the postseason with the bowl prep and things like that? What is the difference for the team between 8 wins and 7 wins?



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COACH FERENTZ: It's good emotionally in all regards. It's like anything else. It's a big difference. To win your last game, we're going to have a break. I don't know where we're going or what the plans are after Saturday, but it's like going into a bye week. It's just more fun to go into a bye week after a win. Doesn't always work that way, but certainly that's our goal. As simple as that. We just want to play well Saturday and try to get a win.

Q. Will you lobby for a bowl is this?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not planning on it. I'm a football coach, other people lobby and market. But the best way I know to do anything is just perform well.

I've said it before, and I say it to our team all the time, for the most part you get what you deserve. And I think it's fair to say so far we've gotten what we deserve. If we play well Saturday, I'm confident something good is going to happen. If we don't, then you leave the door open for whatever.

Best thing we can do is just worry about our play this week. That's what we need to focus on.

Q. What is the one thing Weber's probably improved on the most?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I just got off the phone with one of the reporters. I think the thing that stands out most is how well he played early. It seems to me like the day he hit the field he's looked good.

I'm not saying there hasn't been a progression, but I thought the guy really played very well early in his career, and appeared to be very unflappable. Just had an impressive demeanor out there on the field and that's a credit to him.

As a result of that, it's not a huge surprise that he's had such a good career.

Q. Stoudemire's had a nice career as a kick returner two years ago. That was probably the one detriment you had maybe in that 55-0 game. What do you see out of him? Is this somebody you take away from just because of his success?

COACH FERENTZ: If we're smart we will. It's not like we cover very well. So, that's a sore subject. I can just say he's really a good player. I

mean, he's, as I said in my opening remarks, to my money -- we've got a lot of good kick returners in our league, but I think he's the best. He's proven it on paper and on the field. More importantly on the field.

We got a firsthand glimpse of him two years ago, like you said. It was just hard to believe how well he did against us. He really went right through us.

Q. Are Tarpinian's chances any better this week?

COACH FERENTZ: No, he's not even in our consideration. But for the bowl, I think that's realistic, but not this week.

Q. Based on Minnesota's game against Illinois was that more indicative of how well Minnesota could play or did they just catch the Illini?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it's the Big Ten. Conference games are tough every week. They played very well there. Got the win on the road. And, you know, their game with Northwestern was back and forth, so that could have gone either way. That's a team that beat us.

To try to predict outcomes in our conference or to think you know going into it what's going to happen, I wouldn't want to venture down that path, and I hope none of our players do. We're getting ready to play a good football game, because they've shown what they're capable of doing there for sure.

Q. From what you've seen, how have the players and staff gone since they moved out Brewster?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that game's indicative of where they're at. They haven't surrendered to that by any stretch. They played a very good game down there against a team that's been playing well. So that's a real credit to them, the staff, the players. We expect their best shot this week.

Q. Has one of the directors ever call you to ask for advice on head coaching openings they have?

COACH FERENTZ: I have to think before I talk. I can think of two instances. Yeah, two instances. In both cases they were A.D.'s that I've worked with. Guys that I had known through the years. So that's the only two times I can think of.

Q. A couple of guys turned pro a year early last year. Is there anybody this year that you think even is thinking about that?

COACH FERENTZ: I wouldn't have advised it necessarily last year, and I don't think I did. I think it's fair to say I'd say the same thing this year. I think any juniors we have are better served to stay in.

But you never know what players are thinking. And I know the media will ask. They already have. And I realize that's part of the game that has to be played. It's a distraction, but, you know.

Q. Is that easy to predict?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I guess potentially, you know. Potentially.

Q. Players that have risen to that, I guess?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, we're going through yesterday's news. But I think it is predictable pretty accurately. I think he was in the same scenario as Gallery was. None of us would know as if he would have stayed another year. Don't know if he would have been a Top 5 guy or not.

I think he would have been. But it's not like he made a bad choice. If Gallery had come out year four, he probably would have been a 22 to 25 guy, 30 guy. So those aren't bad choices. They paid off for them.

I mean, there's A's and B's. Then the other player last year ended up third round, which he might have gone up or he might not have. It can go both ways. So there are no right answers. That is a player's decision.

Q. Alex Kanellis, Jayme Murphy, they've had their careers altered by concussions, more than one. Is there concern with that in that regard?

COACH FERENTZ: Not on my front or the medical people's. Concussions are part of football. I know they're talked about now more than ever before, but I don't want to turn this into Days of Our Lives or General Hospital.

I mean, football, you get knee injuries, you get concussions. It's just part of the game. You play a position. Running backs get hit pretty hard, it's going to happen. We haven't had an in-depth study.

But I've gone back and reviewed some of the stuff. We've had pretty average numbers the last number of years. One thing is we've had more game times missed due to concussions, and the conditions around concussions have changed. How they're looked at, diagnosed and treated.

We're a lot more cautious now than we were a decade ago. So those are things that we'll look at in the off-season. But I don't think there is any alarm here. From what I've heard, there is no reason to be alarmed in Adam's case or anybody else that's had a concussion.

Outside of Poggi's, Poggi's was a different story but that was from special teams.

Q. Is it the severity of the concussion?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and reoccurrence, all those types of things, what have you.

Q. He hadn't fumbled, I think I'm correct, he hadn't fumbled in the first year and a half?

COACH FERENTZ: That's accurate.

Q. He's had three in the last three games. Were those good hits, was he not protecting the football?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably a combination of everything. That's part of the deal. I can see this is going to be the big story for the next six weeks.

Hopefully he'll be healthy in the bowl, have a heck of a bowl game and we can all turn the page. But I don't know. That's smart, you guys might be on to something.

Q. Have you had any conversations at all with Brandon Wegher?

COACH FERENTZ: No.

Q. Has he got any chance of coming back to your program?

COACH FERENTZ: That's up to him. I've been trying to coach our team. I've been kind of busy the last, however many weeks. We conversed back in August, like I said. Whenever our last conversation was, that's when it was.

My thoughts have been on trying to coach the guys that are here working every day, and that's where it's at.

Who joins our team in January, I don't know. But you've got to be academically eligible and all those things, so I'm really not thinking about

that right now. I'm making sure Marcus is ready to go Saturday.

Q. Did you guys stay at the Crowne Plaza this year?

COACH FERENTZ: We did. We've stayed there every year.

Q. The city just bought it and it's going to be closed for a period of time. Does that effect what you guys are doing?

COACH FERENTZ: We're thinking about setting some tents up out there. I don't know if that's going to work in November. We've been there. Actually we had an option to leave last year and we chose to stay, only because the people that worked there have been so good to us. We'll take that opportunity just to thank them.

They've been tremendous. The staff's been outstanding. Particularly the people that serve us meals all the time. It's like going to your aunt's house when you go up there. It's just been great. The hospitality's been outstanding, so someone did mention that to me a couple days back, it's really not paramount in my thinking.

So we're going to be looking for a home. We'll see what happens.

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