

September 17, 2011



Iowa – 31
Pitt – 27

An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Obviously just really pleased with the win, happy for our players. I thought their effort was outstanding. Anybody that was at the game or saw the game clearly we had a lot of play with loose ends, just a lot of mishaps that made it really tough on ourselves in a lot of different regards.

But the big thing is the guys hung in there and they kept fighting, certainly got it done there in the last, whatever it was, 20 minutes. Just really proud of their efforts.

We clearly have a lot of work to do. It all starts with the effort and not quitting. Our guys did a great job of that. Pittsburgh made it hard on us. Credit to them. They played a good game. They have a good football team. They certainly made it tough on us.

Q. This is a game you won't forget.

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. I was trying to forget it somewhere there about mid third quarter. Things weren't going very well. Nothing really looked very pretty, maybe outside of Eric Guthrie's punts.

Just really pleased with the way the guys hung in there. Like Gary just said, I think it's one of the biggest comebacks ever in Iowa history. That will be good medicine for our football team, something we really needed.

Q. What do you do in a comeback?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, needless to say I'm very happy. Whatever happens we're going to

push forward and try to get better next week. But with a team with a lot of young guys, I'm going to say we're a young team, we got some good senior players, older players, but we have a lot of moving parts right now, so for us to be able to do that, pull something off like that, especially when it looks pretty bleak, if we allow it to be, it will be a really good thing for us and help our growth.

Q. What button did you push at that point?

COACH FERENTZ: I wish I could tell you. The biggest thing, I just shared with our players, the best thing about it to me, we were kind of self-inflicting ourselves, self-inflicted wounds in all three areas, then it was really a team win. If you think about the kickoff coverage, Joe Audlehelm coming up with a big play, then Tommy Donatell following up with a really big play. Those kind of things spark a defense, they certainly sparked the crowd. We were struggling. We wanted to throw the ball a little bit today but were struggling in the passing game. Really found our rhythm in the last 20 minutes. That was really good to see.

Q. On the first two and a half quarters, how did Vandenberg look?

COACH FERENTZ: He was fine other than we weren't doing well. When we were doing well, we'd get a negative yardage play, penalty, a holding call, what have you.

Those second and 20s are really tough to deal with, third and 15s are tough to deal with. I don't know how many we had, how good we were. I know we weren't good on third down in the first part of the game. But James is a pretty composed guy. He's got his wits together at all times. If he doesn't, he doesn't show it.

The other thing I had to remind myself during the course of the game, too, he's still a pretty young guy out on that field. We had Stanzi last year, was a three-year player. James is

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whatever now, four starts. Not only help him but a lot of our younger guys, this is going to be really good.

Q. (Question regarding the no-huddle offense.)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know that we work on it any more than we have in the past. Maybe a little bit more. We spent maybe a little bit more time since I guess even in spring ball.

But you really don't want to be in that situation where in the third quarter you have to go to it, but we did. Realistically that's where we had to go. And James has a knack. I think he's always had a good knack of operating that, even when he's second team. So that's a part of it, too, just having a little feel for things.

The execution overall was pretty good. It was great to have some young guys step up and make plays, guys that haven't done a lot in the game. Bullock had a touchdown run, Kevonte Martin-Manley making a couple TD grabs. If we're going to have a team that's represented, we're going to have contributions from everybody. That was great to see. Zach Derby making some big plays for us, too, which was outstanding.

Q. You seemed emotional after the game. What about this game brought out those emotions?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, probably because I watch this team every day. You got a feel for where we're at, what our challenges are. You know, I mean, my sister could have been at the game, she might have been watching, come to think of it, she could have been at the game and said, Boy, this team has a lot of work to do right now. And we do. There's every phase.

So despite all our rough spots, despite our deficiencies right now, our inexperience, whatever it may be, whatever it is, wherever it is, to push through and still get the game, to win the game, have the guys feel good about themselves afterwards, that's something a growing team really needs. You need that.

Quite frankly, we could use one of those in November, too. I think I read enough about that as well. It's just an important part. You know, just puts a whole different light on things.

Q. A lot of the players talked about James' composure in the huddle. How big is that for him?

COACH FERENTZ: We were just talking a little bit a while ago. He always gives you that appearance. I don't know what's going on, I'm not a mind reader. He typically looks unflappable. You go back to the Ohio State game, that's how he appeared there. The Minnesota game, the next week, which was kind of like this one for a while, there wasn't much going right.

So that's always his demeanor, that's just how he is. But clearly things weren't going well. But he never came unglued, stayed positive, kept pushing. Then things started moving well for us.

Q. What did you think of the play of Kevonte today?

COACH FERENTZ: I just said a minute ago, it's great to have a lot of young guys step up, be it Kevonte, which was great to see. He wasn't running very well in August. He had a foot injury. He was out there. Certainly didn't look like he was going to be able to help us a lot. That was huge for him. All the receivers I think have been practicing better, which is great.

Bullock got his first carry, took it right in the end zone. Nice cut he made and a tough run. I take it back, he wasn't in the end zone. But they put the ball inside the 1. I stand corrected. I thought it was a touchdown.

So it was a good, nice cut by him. And he kept the ball in his arm. That's the biggest worry with a young guy.

Again, Audlehelm, Donatell on the kick teams, that's what we're going to need if we're going to have a chance to have a good team.

Q. Keenan Davis had a good day.

COACH FERENTZ: I missed that talking on the radio with Gary. Gary talked about him like he's a grizzled veteran. To me, he is just like Vandenberg, hasn't played much. Both have done some really good things, but they're still guys that haven't played much. That's huge. We need those guys. Guys graduate every year in college, we've graduated some pretty good ones the last two years. Somebody has to step up there and get it done.

I can't say enough about Keenan. I thought he grew a lot last week. I know it was a tough ending for him, but he grew a lot last week. This is another step in the progression and same with James I think.

Q. Did you have any sense in practice this week it might be tough to shake off a previous loss and keep going today?

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily. I think we had pretty good practice actually. You know, Sundays are always tough, they're always tough after a loss. We talk about shaking it off. But easier said than done.

I thought Tuesday, Wednesday we had pretty good focus out there. Didn't show in the first three quarters, but at least we did.

Q. (Question regarding changes on defensive starters.)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, first of all, we were hoping Tyler (Nielsen) could go. We thought he could. He couldn't play effectively. He tried. Next thing you know Kirksey is out at the leo, outside backer position, Hitchins was back in there at will.

Now that last week is gone, I'll just say it, he didn't have a real great outing. Only played 12 snaps. Wasn't much to write home about. He must have played better today. That's what we're looking for.

Then, yeah, we tweaked a couple things. Slid Micah out to the corner. Tanner jumped in at the free. Jordan was out last week. We weren't necessarily going to start him last week, but I think you would have seen him in the game. I think he's flying around at a tempo that we haven't seen from him.

I mentioned at the I Club breakfast yesterday morning, I was here in the '80s with three guys that I coached that were in the offensive line, they didn't start till their fifth years, and they were all NFL picks. One of them was a first-round pick. I'm not saying Jordan is. But those guys all find their spot at different times.

That's two games. Now it looks like Jordan is flying around, having fun, playing with enthusiasm. And nobody's forgetting about Collin either. Collin has been doing okay. Maybe we're going to get a little depth out of this whole thing.

Q. Is it better with Hyde at corner?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I tell you what, I guess you could make that argument. We didn't have a lot of choices in the spring. Tanner Miller was not out there so we felt we would get a look at it. We wanted to ride it through. Good news is he can always slide back there and we'll see what happens.

But, yeah, those are huge plays. That was a great way to finish the game obviously. Just told the Insight Bowl guys, three hosts from December were here, said he must like showing off for you guys. Bring them back every week.

Q. How big was the Donatell play right there?

COACH FERENTZ: Really big. Two points on it. We've been so bad. I mean there's no issue or sugar coating. We've been so bad, awful on kickoff coverage. Joe Audelhelm got one and then Tommy came back and got that one. So it was field position.

Just plays like that spark everybody on the bench. Then obviously it helped the stadium, too. I mean, shoot, we're playing at home, might as well get our fans into it. We were having a hard time doing that. They wanted to early. We kind of lost them there for obvious reasons.

Q. Are you concerned about Marcus Coker?

COACH FERENTZ: The only thing I can tell you he missed a lot of time back in camp. That's what happens. Kevonte is the same way. He wasn't moving around much in August. Today he looked okay. It was a positive step forward.

We'll be okay. It would be better if in Mika'il had stayed healthy. That train left the station. Next guy up. This will be a good experience for him.

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