

November 19, 2013



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, and just a couple things here real quickly. Our captains are the same four guys. Got James Morris and Chris Kirksey defensively, Brett Van Sloten and Mark Weisman offensively. Kind of appears to be locked in at that point. Steve just mentioned on Saturday is senior day, so it's obviously a bittersweet day for everybody involved and a very special day, seniors' last chance to play in Kinnick, and then on top of that we've got a very talented team coming in here with the University of Michigan, so really want to begin our preparation in earnest this afternoon.

Q. A year ago they handled the game pretty well. All of a sudden you look now and you guys are the favorite team. Does that surprise you a little?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm unaware of that, but last year we never even got our hands up, especially in that second quarter. It was over pretty quickly. They've got a lot of the same faces back from a year ago. I can't remember a Michigan team that wasn't extremely talented. We've still got a lot of work to do at our end, so it's going to be a tough, tough task for us.

Q. Teams have had a lot of success blitzing them, blitzing Gardner. What do you give up to do that?

COACH FERENTZ: The issue for us is we're not a big blitz team. Our percentages are probably way lower than most people. Typically for us to get there we've got to get there with our front four. That is an area we need to improve upon. It's going to be a challenge. But we certainly can't let him get comfortable back there and we can't let

him get outside, either. He did that a few times last year and we paid for it, both run and pass. He's a very talented guy and can hurt you a couple different ways.

Q. Your defensive ends did a really good job against Northwestern containing Colter. Do you need that again?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we do, and fortunately we've been fairly disciplined. Ohio State got out on us. It was a tough one. Like Colter, Gardner is extremely capable and very dangerous, and that's something we're going to have to hopefully be disciplined again.

Q. With the defense, how much do you think last year's game will motivate you, the memory of what happened in that game? Do you guys bring it up?

COACH FERENTZ: I only bring it up because we're playing them today. Today is press day and you just get done looking at last year's film yesterday, and it was hard to watch. The good news is I think we're a totally different team than we were a year ago. We put that behind us at the end of November a year ago, and we've just been looking forward. But all that being said, the one thing that doesn't change is you play Michigan, they've got a lot of talented players. They're very well coached and it's going to be a tough, tough match-up for us.

Q. Did you do a lot of work on Michigan last week, or was it more about a fundamental type of week?

COACH FERENTZ: We physically -- is fundamentals, and then coaching-wise our guys were on the road a couple days and then came back in and get -- probably started much like the last bye week, game plan wise, but we didn't do anything on our opponent at all a week ago. We waited until Sunday.

Q. Given what Jordan Canzeri showed you at Purdue and given it's this late in the season, do you envision Jordan being a bigger part of the offense these last two weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, he's certainly in the rotation now a lot more prominently than a month ago. And then the other good news is with the bye week, I think our backs will be fresher. I won't say they're worn down, but like our whole team, I think everybody gets a little bit tired as the year goes on. It's a long season. Last week gave our guys a chance maybe to get their legs back. Hopefully that's the case. I think we definitely saw it with Jordan in the two games he appeared in before the break.

Q. With what Braxton Miller did to your defense, is that a correctable thing or is that just a tip of the hat?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. I say that, there were a couple plays that he just, in your mind, the play this year, Pryor in 2010, you go back to Seneca Wallace throwing that ball across the field for a 17-yard conversion, 3rd and 17 I think it was, you've got a couple Kodak moments that stick out in your mind that I'm not sure you can't defend those things. You keep trying, but you've got to give credit to your opponent, too. That's three in 15 years. That's a one every five years, so hopefully we used that one up this fall already. I hope.

Q. What can you say about how much your three linebackers meant to you this year? It's pretty unique to have three starting and playing so well?

COACH FERENTZ: They played pretty well a year ago and they're playing at a much higher level this year, I think, and that kind of tells the story that the deeper story to me is the leadership they've given and leadership is all about what you do in terms of demonstrating your commitment, and those guys really have practiced hard last spring, certainly in camp and they've played well all year long. But they've improved because they do work at it. They prepare, they study, they spend a lot of time. Beyond that they think way beyond themselves. They're really good team-oriented guys. All three of them are just tremendous that way. Good with the younger guys, good with the older guys. Anything that we're doing they're in the front. I'm talking about things away from football, too. They're just -- you

can't say enough about them. It's a really good group, and we've had some good groups. We've had some really good linebackers, just heard a story about Tarpinian surfacing in Houston. I don't know if you saw it or not this week, but it sounded like he was going to. We've had some really outstanding guys at that position, and these three guys have really done a nice job of leaving their mark here.

Q. You experienced two senior days as a father. What was that like for you just when those guys were introduced to the crowd, and what do you tell somebody like Greg Morris who's going to have having that moment Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Good luck. It's hard on all the coaches, I think. That's one thing about coaching in college or high school. Your guys graduate. You should get used to it, but you don't. It's always a little bit bittersweet that way. And that for a parent, that is a moment. Even if you are a coach, you are a parent at that moment more so than a coach, and it's hard. It's a tough thing. But you're also very proud of your -- I'll tell you, anybody that runs this race, and I say it all the time. I say it to our team, anybody that runs the race to become a senior and go through their senior year here, whether they're four-year starters like James Morris or guys that never hit the field, the level of commitment that takes, mental toughness, all that stuff, the work these guys do behind the scenes, it's amazing.

And then most guys suffer some type of injury. Hopefully it's not involving surgery, but most of them have experienced injury during their careers. It's just a really tough road. It's not for everybody. I think I speak for everybody on our staff, anybody that comes through the program and makes it to midfield at Kinnick, that's quite an accomplishment. We've been really fortunate. We've had a lot of great young people. That's not unique to Iowa, but it's a real compliment to the guys that do it.

Q. With the bond that Greg and James have, you've been around both of them for a long time. How do you feel it's strengthened since he's been here?

COACH FERENTZ: You're stealing time as a dad. I think Greg will probably tell you that because James could have gone to a lot of

schools, and if he's somewhere else, those are moments you don't get. Any time you can steal time with your kids, it's no different for any parent, whether it's taking your kid to breakfast or whatever, just riding in the car with them, those are good things. Any time you get with them, that's bonus time, and I imagine that's pretty good for both those guys.

Q. The guys who never get their names in the paper are seldom talked about but do make it all the way to the end, what do they tell you five, ten years later?

COACH FERENTZ: I think back, we had a couple bumps in the road a couple years ago and one of the first names I'll think of is Brett Chinander, who happens to be good friends with my oldest son. He's a pretty successful young guy right now, works for John Deere, he's an engineering major, never started here or played any significant snaps, but just -- what they kickback to, and it's like anything in life, usually it's five years down the road or ten years down the road and you get letters and phone calls and things like that. I think any coach or any teacher or anybody in education, those are probably the best things that you experience, those comments you get.

A lot of times you have no idea, I'm talking when I say you, I mean not me individually, but you just never know when you're going to impact someone, and I think that's one of the neat things for people that are involved in education or coaching, you get those opportunities, and that's probably why you'd better be careful what you're doing because you never know when you are impacting someone in a positive or negative way.

Q. Do you have any guys who would fit in the category of a senior class, oh, my goodness, you're still here and I'm glad you are, guys who kind of plug along and you look around, maybe they're on special teams, maybe not?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I can just say this in general: The whole class, this class has just been totally committed, and they all made that choice and they knew -- it wasn't much fun last year at the end of the year. There wasn't a lot to smile about. There certainly wasn't much coming out of Ann Arbor, and a week later we're sitting there at 4 and 8, so that wasn't a lot of fun. But they all signed up for this this year, and not only did they sign up, but they really, I think, came together in a real strong fashion, and they've been

just doing a great job of taking care of business and showing the younger guys what needs to be done and how to do it.

Q. Do you have admiration for a player like Nolan MacMillan who did start a few years ago and fought through a lot of injuries?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, in some ways it's easier to be a starter. It's easier to be motivated I would suppose. But for the guys that end up having heartbreak along the way due to injuries and that type of thing, that's part of the territory. Or just never -- knowing that they're not going to start, but hey, how can I help the team, and that's the neat thing about football I think especially because our numbers are so big that you have more individual type stories yet the common bond is they all care about each other. They're all committed to being good team members and they come to practice every day with a good attitude, and that is their responsibility, but they all embrace it. They're not fighting it, and that's a good thing.

Q. It seems like you've maybe played your best games this season on the road. You've obviously had three at home. Is there any reason for that or is it just luck of the draw?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I mean, I look at everything individually, I guess. We played pretty well against Wisconsin for 50 minutes. As it turns out they're a good football team. I thought we played good against Northwestern. We did what it took to win, and they're another -- I know their record is not great, but you could do a pretty great story on their losses right now. They're a tough football team and they were tough the day we played them.

Every game is kind of an individual thing, and Michigan State everybody was -- the sky was falling that day, too, and it turns out they're not bad. We thought they were pretty good going into the game. I think every week is an adventure.

Q. How do you stop a quarterback who can run?

COACH FERENTZ: The best way is probably is to find somebody who can track him down. It worked pretty good when we had Bob Sanders against Randle El. The trouble is finding that guy that can really do it and it makes it a little

bit tricky.

Q. Did you do that against Northwestern?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really, no.

Q. Did you do it against Ohio State?

COACH FERENTZ: No. How do you match up with that guy? That's the problem.

Q. What can you say about the development of Rudock?

COACH FERENTZ: I think every step has been positive. He had a good week last week, too. It all starts with attitude, which we were sold on that part of it. You just never know what he's going to do during games and that type of thing. We've played 10 games now, and I think he's grown with every experience. As I've said all along, he really just kind of handles whatever comes in front of him in a pretty good way and doesn't react. Things don't affect him. They affect him but he doesn't let it affect him. He learns from it and moves on, and he's a tough-minded guy, and the biggest thing now is he's earned everybody's respect by playing well. We're counting on him certainly the next two weeks.

Q. Is there any update on Dominic Alvis?

COACH FERENTZ: He's working a little bit. It's just a matter of how long he can go or how effectively he can play. We got a little bit of a look at him. We'll see what this week brings, but it's kind of day-to-day, actually.

Q. Most of the dual threats you've faced aren't as tall as Gardner. How much does that help him? He's 6'4".

COACH FERENTZ: He's a really imposing, physical guy. The guy at Ohio State was maybe not as tall but a strong guy. He's just a good, very dangerous player, and last year he really hurt us. He really hurt us, break and contain a little bit, but he hurt us more throwing the ball. He had 300-plus yards throwing, I guess it was, so he's capable of doing both.

Q. You have three senior linebackers. They probably assumed that that was the roadmap all along, you plug these three guys in and here they are. It hasn't been quite that easy. You had to kind of do some hunt-and-peck at least with Anthony?

...when all is said, we're done.®

ASAPsports

visit our archives at asapsports.com

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Hitch is a good example. He was a running back/safety, and we moved him to the position he's playing now. I actually threw him in against Missouri. I can't remember if we threw him in before that a little bit.

Like most guys his career has been up and down a little bit but this year it's been up, and it's a real credit to him sticking with it, really studying, working hard. He's got a great attitude. He's always had a great attitude, but there's definitely experience, too. He's really making that work for himself.

Q. Do you think they're almost perfectly matched in their personalities?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, I mean, they're all different, certainly. It's just been a good group to work with. They're a lot of fun. A lot of interchangeable parts, too. They can play a couple different positions. That's a good thing.

Q. It's not very often you see a kid play as many games as Mike Meyer has. Do you think that position is harder play because of the psychological nature?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it's not easy, and there have been instances where the longer it goes, the worse it gets for guys, the mental games that you can play with yourself a little bit. It's probably a little bit like being a golfer or a hitter in baseball, something like that. But yes, it takes a certain psyche, a mentality. I'm not saying his career is Nate Kaeding's career, but there are some parallels in that Nate had his ups and downs early and then just really hardened through the process, went on and did great things beyond playing in college.

I think Mike has had his ups and downs, too, and again, that's very typical I think of any player in any position. Mike is in a position where it's kind of like Saturday night it's easier to say this team did that, that team did that, and everybody has got opinions about kickers because what they do is very visible, it's out there. When they perform, it's all out there for people. But he's really done a great job and he's done a great job on kickoffs, too, which was kind of under the radar a little bit, but really important to a football team.

Q. If you could use one word to describe Meyer, what would it be?

COACH FERENTZ: First thing I think

about is the way he's matured. He's just an outstanding player. He and Casey Kreiter. Casey hasn't played as much, but both those guys just have tremendous attitudes, special teams guys that bring a lot of energy to the football team. Going back to that senior class, those guys are a little bit forgotten. They were only with the team for maybe 12 minutes a day in practice time, but they are totally on board.

Q. This time of year I know a lot of fans speculate about bowls. Do you hear any of that noise or do you think about what the future might hold?

COACH FERENTZ: I read all that last week and put it down, and clearly nobody knows anything about anything right now, other than there may be certain things. But the landscape looks different today than it did a week ago, and it'll probably keep changing. That's my guess, especially at the top. Early November is the panic season. We've got five teams or six teams that should be in the championship game, and it's amazing how that number gets pared down a little bit as things go along, so we'll just see where it all goes. Bowls are the same way. We're not too worried about that. We've got a real tough opponent this week.

Q. Does the team have better overall confidence this year than last year?

COACH FERENTZ: I have no idea. I think we're a little better so we're trying to do our part. We sure didn't do it last year.

Q. You had Purdue, did you work your way into sort of a plan at running back with Canzeri? And you used Mark in a lot of short yardage.

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, Mark was a little beat up at that point, but I think he's feeling a lot better now. So we'll try to use everybody we can, like every position, but one is a little bit more prominent so everybody can see what's going on there.

Yes, if he's fresh and ready to go, we'll utilize everybody for sure.

Q. Would you have preferred to see Michigan lose Saturday as opposed to getting a little bit of a lift?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I didn't have any real strong feeling. If I did, it didn't matter. Like most of my stuff.

I was kind of watching and see what happened.

Q. How interesting is it to have a guy like Glen Masson, who you competed against, come in and call you game from the television booth?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, he's probably not getting too many secrets. I think that's one I think that's really been overstated through the years. I can remember not too long ago, people were really secretive about films and what you say at clinics and all that. Pretty much your résumé is what's on tape, and anybody can get tape anywhere now. It's true in coaching.

I kind of enjoy it. I like hearing what he has to say, hear his perspective on things. I immensely enjoy Gerry DiNardo. I don't get to watch a lot of TV, but I think he and Howard Griffith do a really good job. I think they have a really good perspective from what I've seen, and I thoroughly enjoy it when they come through, what they see in practice, those types of things. I kind of welcome that actually. It's always good to hear what other people are saying that have been through it. It's kind of interesting what they observe.

Q. You competed against him for so long that you're able to just kind of put that in the rear view mirror?

COACH FERENTZ: He's not coaching right now, so I'm not too worried about it. But if he gets back into it -- what's he going to know, we run a zone play? Big deal. And we run an under defense. The cat's out of the bag on those two.

Q. You mentioned that you thought this team was improved from last year's team. How would you assess the improvement you've seen from last year to this year, and this final couple of games? Is that something you talk about with your team, that you've got the chance to make this a pretty special season?

COACH FERENTZ: We've talked about that from the start, when it started back in November. The only good thing about finishing the season, if it's a bad season, is that season is over. You do the same after a good season. It's a new season, whenever that curtain drops, which it dropped pretty early last year, so I guess the only positive was we had another month as this year's

team to be together. You'd much rather be going into January before you go through that process.

But no matter what happens you flip the page and you start new. No team is the same and no week is the same, either, once you get into a season.

The one thing I will say, this group has really just been fun to work with since last November, and we're 10 games into it, 12 weeks into the season right now, and I say the same thing, and I'm pretty confident I'll be saying that 12 days from now or whatever it is, 10 days now. It's going fast.

Hopefully we'll have a record -- we can fortify our record, but that's not going to come easy. We've got a lot of challenges starting today. Today's practices, we've got a lot of challenges in front of us. But it's been just a fun team to be around and coach.

Q. You mentioned last week that you had one player who might have been iffy before the game last week --

COACH FERENTZ: Good to go. He was good to go Sunday, and ready to go. It was right there on the wire.

Q. James Morris is a semifinalist for the Lott Award. How proud are you of what he's accomplishing on and off the field?

COACH FERENTZ: We've had a lot of really exceptional people, and you don't want to say he's the only one because we've had some really outstanding guys who haven't gotten the publicity, but I can't think of many guys better than James that have come through here. He's just a really phenomenal guy. I'd love to take credit for his academic prowess, a lot of people would. But it's probably irresponsible. I wouldn't do that. Just everything he does, he does it in a first-class way. He's just a tremendous student. He was honored by the political science department last spring, the National Football Foundation Hall of Fame scholarship. That group he'll be with in New York is a phenomenal group of young people, and he's just been a tremendous representative of our program, our state, our university, and certainly his family.

You get those guys, and boy, I'll tell you when you have them you just enjoy them. You enjoy him every day, yet he's another guy on our football team. He's not somewhere up there. He's just one of the guys on our team, and that's

something that is uncommon, too, so he is just a tremendous young man.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports