

September 18, 2007



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: I'll start with the freshmen thing. I just reevaluated that policy, and I think, based on some things I've seen and read, it might be better right now if we let these guys get their feet on the ground. I'm going to wait till they've played a year and make sure they know left from right before we start letting them give commentary on things.

So we're going to adjust that policy. Maybe be open to some human interest stories, things like that, down the road. Right now I'm not sure we're equipped to handle it. We're going to reevaluate that deal.

Injury-wise, we have two guys out of the ballgame for sure. Bryan Bulaga, Trey Stross, still rehabbing injuries. In Bryan's case I'm not quite sure how close we are. Trey Stross, I think we have a chance to get him back maybe in a week. If not, certainly two weeks.

Outside of that, I think -- outside of the surgery guys we had earlier, everybody has a realistic chance to be ready to go on Saturday. Hopefully that will be the case.

Then obviously we made an announcement yesterday, Lance Tillison has been suspended for two weeks from game action. He'll be out of the program this week. We'll let him play on the scout teams next week. He'll miss two ball games. That's certainly disappointing. Bottom line is it just leads me to believe I've probably done a poor job of communicating. It's very disappointing. So, we'll handle that and move on.

Captain-wise this week we'll go with Albert Young, Damian Sims, and Mike Klinkenborg and Bryan Mattison on defense will serve as our defensive captains.

Last week's game, was disappointing, certainly. Things don't look a lot differently after watching the tape. Basically we didn't give ourselves a good enough chance to win. They certainly played an excellent football game. Bottom line is they come out the winner and we have to move on right now.

It is exciting to get the Big-10 part of the season started. We're looking forward to that. It's going to be a challenging game. We're playing on the road in a very tough environment. On top of that, we're playing a team that's outstanding in all regards. They had a great year last year really with a pretty young football team.

They have done a good job in two areas. Number one, I thought last year I made the comment that they really improved a lot as the season went on. That was my observation. We played them late in the year last year, as you recall. I think they certainly got better every week and carried that through the Bowl game.

They've been able to replace some outstanding seniors. They were strong up the middle with two senior safeties and a middle linebacker. They've been able to replace those players with guys doing a nice job, and then also on top of that I think the guys that they have back have continued to improve. So they're very, very impressive in all regards.

This will be a big week for us in that we're playing an outstanding opponent, and also we clearly have work to do. That's kind of what is in front of us right now. We're eager to get started this afternoon.

Q. What's first on the docket?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's fairly generic. What we have to do right now is improve. I thought that was the story of the game last week. They clearly made more strides during the week of preparation than we did. They clearly played their best football out of three games and we clearly

didn't.

We just have -- things aren't going to change really dramatically week to week. It's just a matter of getting our younger guys to be a little bit more detail oriented, and we all need to collectively do a better job.

Q. Are there any weaknesses with the team that you maybe didn't notice the first two weeks that you were winning that after a loss seem to be more glaring?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think so. I said Saturday, and I still think this is pretty accurate, I think most of the problems or challenges that popped up were fairly predictable. They came in areas that you'd anticipate them to come up in. You know, the fact that they may not have surfaced as evidently in the first two games, it's just the way it goes.

Any time you have some spots, every team does, that you have concerns about, you realize that those things can pop up at any time. Unfortunately a couple of them did collectively Saturday, and that didn't help us.

Q. What type of spots were those?

COACH FERENTZ: One thing, we didn't handle the environment. Our second road game, but really our first trip in a tough environment. I don't think we did great with that.

And then the areas we're young in. We're a young football team in certain spots right now. I think that showed up.

Q. Christensen's play, how did that grade out?

COACH FERENTZ: That's part of the equation there certainly. It was a tough environment. Crowd noise, all that type of thing. Then they gave us a couple wrinkles. But, again, I think the thing that is impressive to me about Jake is his attitude. He's pretty unflappable. He really wants to do well. There's no doubt in my mind he will do well.

I think I said a couple weeks ago we weathered some ups and downs with Drew Tate again and Brad Banks, both in their first year as starters. Both those guys led us to Big-10 championships, too, that very same year.

You know, to me that's predictable. You're going to have those. You're not sure when they're going to pop up. Just so happens it was the third game of the season this year. The challenge for

us right now is to get through those bumps, move forward, learn from them.

That's one good thing about stubbing your toe: it's graphic evidence. Here are some things we have to do better. If you can learn from them, improve, you have a chance to become a good football team. That's the task that's out there for us. I'm confident Jake's going to do that. I think he'll learn from this past week and be a much better player this week.

Q. Looked like it was a good play by him.

COACH FERENTZ: It really was. He's made some plays with his feet the last two weeks, and that's good. That's going to help us be a better offensive football team. We don't have a guy on our football team more committed, more dedicated. He works extremely hard.

I got to hang around a little bit Saturday evening to do the TV show. You probably all thought that was filmed on the day they show it on Sunday. I ended up being here a couple hours later than everybody else Saturday, and he's downstairs watching the tape. That's how this guy thinks.

When you have guys thinking like that, putting the effort in, results are going to come.

Q. Is that out of the ordinary for a quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if it is or not. But you hope quarterbacks are into it that way. I mean, it is the ultimate, I think, preparation position. They got to know so much, they're responsible for so much on game day. So it's certainly a good trait. To me it reflects or indicates how invested he is. And he has been. It's not just this year. He was the same way last year.

Q. Do you like to see that?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, yeah, most definitely. I don't expect them to be in here the day of a game. After a ballgame, I don't expect that.

Q. Looking at the Iowa State game?

COACH FERENTZ: He was looking at that day's tape. He wanted to see what happened. Like a coach. You have a feel on the game, but you got to see the tape to really know, A, B and C, the details.

Q. With the offense ranking in the bottom in a lot of categories.

COACH FERENTZ: Ours or theirs?

Q. For you guys.

COACH FERENTZ: Talking about us, okay. Which categories? Is that National or Big-10?

Q. Big-10. How concerned are you about that?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not trying to be a smart aleck.

I don't look at stats a lot this time of year quite frankly, because I think it's a little bit like records and rankings. There are some things that are obvious. They're valid. We're a work in progress. We knew that coming in.

Outside of one game we haven't scored a lot of points. That's a concern. The objective is to score points. Ultimately that's the only stat that matters outside of winning and losing.

But it's a work in progress. Everything's tied together. We're capable. We'll get there. I'm not worried about it.

Q. How much did the wide receivers contribute, their inexperience? You mentioned it last week. They were kind of piecing it together. Young guys. How much did that contribute to the struggle?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a challenge. Any time you have players out for whatever reason or when you have -- which results in younger players playing, it's a challenge. It's not just one position. We have several positions like that.

But, again, we knew that. You also know things are going to happen during the course of the season. Trey Stross is out right now. That's part of football. But that being said, one of the best plays I thought of the game was Colin Sandeman making a great catch knowing he was going to take one under the chin, which he did. He made a great football play. That was certainly a positive.

I thought Austin's field goal to put us up was a huge play. Not only at that time of the game, but huge for him. Hopefully that's something that will give him confidence now. He's been struggling a little bit. He's a much better kicker than he's shown. Those kinds of things have to take place.

Q. How do you as coaches look back at the film from Saturday and assess your performance?

COACH FERENTZ: When you get beat, and we did, it's everybody. We didn't coach well enough. We certainly didn't play well enough, prepare well enough. That's collective. When I say -- any time something happens, that's everybody in the room. It starts with the coaches, starts with the head coach.

My job is to get the team ready to play, have them show up at game time, be it 7:13, what was the last one, 12:30 or whatever it was, 11:00, it's our job to be ready to go. And we didn't get that done.

Q. You're the only team in the country not to allow a touchdown yet. How are you happy with their play overall?

COACH FERENTZ: Stats, and that's a nice stat, don't get me wrong. We're 2-1 as a football team. I think that bears mentioning, too. You could look at every phase of the game the other day: offense, defense, special teams. There are things we could have done better that would have helped keep them from getting five field goals.

We were capable of doing better, I guess is what I'm saying. I think we're playing well defensively. Certainly to not give up a touchdown, yeah, that's significant. But we haven't arrived by any stretch and we can do better. That's got to be our attitude.

Q. How much are third downs attributing to the problems on offense?

COACH FERENTZ: Common sense tells you third and longs are tougher than third and shorts, although we didn't convert a third and short the other day, too. Third down was huge obviously. But part of it, we had four or five negative yardage plays, starting with the first play of the ballgame. We started out second and 14.

Those things factor into third downs, obviously. Maybe a little bit more subtle than what the third down percentages are.

Q. You have rebounded from early losses some years, others you haven't. Are you confident in the psyche of this team to do that?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, only time

will tell. But I said a week ago, I don't feel a lot different than I did last week or two weeks ago or three weeks ago. I really like this football team. It's been a fun group to work with. We're getting great leadership out of our seniors. We only have a dozen, but they're doing a great job. We've got a lot of guys who are working extremely hard. I think the whole team's working hard.

But that being said, we're sitting here today 2-1. We got a great opportunity this week. Whether we win this week or lose this week, the season's not going to be over. We got nine more laps to run here.

As a coach you have to resist that temptation of what everybody does in the general public, which is try to decide everything after two games, three games or one game. In Southern Cal's situation, you might have a better chance. In our situation, I don't know if that's really prudent.

We'll know a lot more here in a month about where we're heading. To answer your question, I'm not worried about it. I feel good about things.

Q. The team has struggled on the road since the win in Wisconsin in '05.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we were up until last fall, last -- I can't tell you the date of our Northwestern game. Maybe October, November. My son did a good job of pointing out to me that we lost more games in Kinnick at the end of last year than we has in four years. I appreciate his observations. That's what happens when you have a kid who's unemployed. He can think about a lot of things.

But anyway, hopefully he'll get a job and quit feeding me information I don't need to know (laughter).

The bottom line is, if you play well you have a better chance of winning. We won at Wisconsin in '05 because we played a heck of a football game against a very good football team. We were there step for step with them. That's what it takes. It takes the same thing at home. I think we lost sight of that, particularly in the one game there near the end of the year last year.

Whether you're on the road, it's a little tougher on the road certainly, the degree of difficulty goes up a little bit. But you got to play well. It's the bottom line. If you play well you give yourself a chance to win. If you leave the door open, unless you're lucky, chances are you lose more than you win.

Q. You also won there in '03. Any reason for the recent success?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we played well (laughter). We played well. You know, in '03, gallery threatened several individuals on the football team, too. That helped, too. Imposing guy.

Q. Looking at Wisconsin on film, how does Hodge compare to his brother?

COACH FERENTZ: I'd defer to Abdul. I think I read a quote in yesterday's paper. I think I read yesterday's paper today. I'll get today's paper tomorrow. If you come back tomorrow, I'll tell you what I read from today.

Anyway, I think Abdul, what did he say (laughter)? I don't know. I mean, they're both good players. You wrote the article.

Q. Quicker.

COACH FERENTZ: Quicker. Abdul is quicker, or Elijah is quicker. That's pretty fair. Abdul is a pretty fair player. I made the comment earlier. If Elijah's career is half as good as Abdul's he's had a great career. I don't know Elijah half as well as Abdul, but what a great family. Abdul is one of the great guys that's come that this program.

Q. Wisconsin quarterback, Donovan, what does he look like to you? You did a good job last year on Hill.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we did and we didn't. He didn't kill us. I tell you, he's a load. He's an excellent football player. Talking about Hill. Looks like he's lost weight. I think I've read that. His conditioning level is up. That's what I was alluding to. Hill had a great season, he's even better now. He's in better shape. He's more mature. Older, been through the battles, if you will.

He's extremely dangerous. He's a handful.

Donovan is one of the guys I talked about. They graduated a guy Stucco, who had a great record. Did a great job of running their football team. Donovan, we found out firsthand last year, stepped in and did a great job against us. Has done the same this season. He's playing very well. Can beat you with his arm obviously.

The thing we found out, he can beat you with his feet. I thought that was a huge play right before the half where he converted a first down and then they threw the touchdown pass

afterwards.

But I'm not sure they would have attempted the pass if he hadn't made that first down. Did the same thing in the UNLV game at a critical time.

Looks like he can beat you his head. He's a savvy guy, a senior. He's really doing a nice job out there.

Q. Can you talk about Camp Randall, any of your experiences there? Anything that scarred you for life?

COACH FERENTZ: No, nothing I haven't -- I'm not having nightmares right now. Probably the most entertaining thing would be John catching the egg that was coming down for Coach Fry. Coach Fry has talked about them pouring Schnapps, that's how he pronounced it. I'm not sure I remember that, but I don't doubt that it happened. It's a rambunctious place. A great Big-10 environment.

Q. You hear people say you learn a lot from the team the way they respond. Do you believe that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. I think the way you respond to everything, but certainly what we have to do right now is be improvement driven. It would be the same if we had won. That's the challenge in front of us. We are typically a developmental football team, so this is a critical period for us right now.

The whole objective is to go out and get better, not just younger guys, but older guys, too. Everybody needs to be moving forward.

Q. How will he match up with Brett?

COACH FERENTZ: To me it's not about Brett. It's not about me. It's about our two teams playing. I think it's natural that might be a storyline. It's been the storyline every year we've played Wisconsin since I've been back. It was the storyline when we played K State. It was the storyline with Dan over at Iowa State. I understand that.

But to me it's a non-story, other than he's an excellent football coach. I know that firsthand. You can obviously see it on film, too.

Q. How important is this game for recruiting?

COACH FERENTZ: Every game's important and seasons are important. I think seasons are probably more important as far as I'm

concerned. It's really where you're at at the end of the race.

Everything you do is important to recruiting. But I'm really more focused on what our team does this season. That's really what's par amount in my thoughts at all times.

Q. How frustrating is it for you to have to suspend another player for illegal action? Do you think there's anything more you can do to try to make sure this doesn't happen again?

COACH FERENTZ: As I say, I must be a poor communicator. That's a conclusion I shared with our football team. It's very disappointing on a couple fronts. If you look at the big picture, the things that have gone on the past X amount of weeks, whatever it may be.

And then we've been down that road. In 2001 we went down that road and it cost us a couple wins. Then also the timing Saturday. The first question I would have, outside of the fact that it's a serious lack of judgment, is you put people at risk.

And to be guilty of an OUI in Iowa City, Johnson County, Thursday, Friday, Saturday night, you know, you might as well just have a bullseye on your car. All that aside, the timing on that day, it would make you wonder what the average fan out there is thinking, drawing conclusions about a football team.

The unfortunate part there is that Lance is an outstanding young guy. He made a very dumb decision. We got a lot of outstanding guys on the football team. But the facts are the facts. It's just a poor reflection on our whole football team. It's disappointing.

Q. I saw a story today that said, as coaches, athletic directors, Gary Barta said, there's essentially only so much we can do. We need some teammates to start cracking skulls. Do you agree with that?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, peer expectations, peer pressure is probably the most effective way to do anything. A good friend of mine was here watching us during camp when the facebook thing came up. He made the observation.

He said, the interesting part to him was we had to have a couple experts address that topic the year prior to, within 12 months of the incident.

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pretty thoroughly. Obviously we address alcohol, the problems it can bring, pretty thoroughly, too. But it also is a reminder if you work with young people, if you're a parent, a teacher, you're probably well aware of the fact that just when you think they got it, they don't got it. It's just how it goes.

It happens in football, too. It's the world we live in. We'll just keep sawing wood, see what happens.

Q. How much do you get a sense it is bothering the bulk of the team that isn't involved in this?

COACH FERENTZ: A, I don't think it's been a distraction to our team. But, B, I think it hurts everybody. It's just like when you lose, we had a lot of guys, both teams out there Saturday had a lot of guys working extremely hard, that have worked extremely hard for a long time to get to that point.

That's part of the reason you hurt. Any time we take a nick out there in the public eye, so to speak, it's hurtful to all of us because that's part of being a team. That's part of the responsibility of being on a team. You got to think outside your own little world sometimes.

Evidently we're not doing a good enough job in that department right now. We grew out of it in 2002. Hopefully we're going to grow out of it sooner rather than later. I think that's what the majority of the team wants to do.

Q. I don't know what the exact status is, you have started on offensive, received an opening kickoff, haven't had a lot of success on opening drives. Is there an inkling to put the defense out there first?

COACH FERENTZ: Hadn't thought much about it. I got five days to think about that one. We'll see. You look at their offense you might not think it's a great idea. We'll see on that one (laughter).

Q. The performance P.J. Hill had, does it make it easier to scout him when you see him playing him at his best in a game like that?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, this guy's been playing well since he got in there last year. He's really been very, very consistent, very productive. As I said, the only difference in him right now is he's more mature. He's more experienced. He's playing at a high level. We're going to have our hands full with him.



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Swan is an excellent receiver. They have other guys that are good, too. Beckum is a tremendous threat. They use him in a multitude of ways, which makes it tough to lock down on him. The quarterback's playing well. You know you've got enough play-makers, if we want to take Hill away we're going to pay somewhere else.

If we try to sit honestly, then Hill is going to get some yards. It's just the nature of the deal. They're pretty big up front, too. I don't know if you noticed that (laughter). Pretty good ballgame.

Q. Mitch King has had a good start to the season.

COACH FERENTZ: You may not see him this Saturday because their guys are so big. I swear to God, they're like 320. These guys are gigantic. You better stand behind Mitch if you want to see them.

Q. Is that what you expected from him the last couple of years?

COACH FERENTZ: We were hoping that would be the case. He's worked extremely hard. On the other side of the coin we haven't been the biggest outfit in the league typically. I'm not saying he's Jonathan, but there's parallels. Jonathan operated at 275, that ballpark, was a very active guy, really used good technique.

That's what you have to do. We don't have the kind of size that some of the teams do. You have to really use your technique. Can't hang around standing gates, especially with guys like Wisconsin has. That's a heck of a challenge.

Q. With the youth on this team, how much will the Iowa State game and environment there help?

COACH FERENTZ: We've got a lot of road games scheduled. You do every year. Hopefully we'll take whatever happened, be it the environment, the other things that may have popped up during the game. We have to take those now and use them to our advantage. That's the challenge that's out there.

All that being said, it's never easy to play on the road. In our conference, that's the nature of the deal. Hopefully we'll be better prepared.

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