

**November 18, 2014**



An Interview With:

## **HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: The same four guys are captains, Louis and Quinton on the defensive side of the ball and Brandon and Mark on the offensive side. That remains pretty consistent. Riley McCarron came down with mono last week, and he'll be out the next couple of weeks. Hopefully we'll get him back right after that.

Obviously it's a big game this week. We're excited about being back home and playing an outstanding opponent. Wisconsin is basically good on every front, just very well coached. They have good players, and are playing at a really high level right now. We start our preparation today and it will be good to get back on the field.

**Q. All the talk coming into this game and off last week is about the offense and Gordon in particular. But you look at their defense, that is as scary an element to beat, isn't it?**

COACH FERENTZ: It is, and I think it's interesting. If you go back historically, especially in pro football, the Redskins, 49ers, teams that you think about offense, and they had good defense behind them. Same thing with Wisconsin. You can talk about the running attack, because it's so stellar. But I think the amazing thing is a year ago they made that transformation to another scheme, the 3-4 scheme and played it at a really high level.

They are veteran in the back end. But all that being said they're playing at a higher rate statistically. It's impressive. They embrace what they're doing. Obviously, when the change took place, the new staff did a great job of selling their scheme and the players are playing at a really high level. We witnessed that last year, their best guy not on the field didn't play, and they didn't miss a

beat. That's what you've seen this year, as well. They're statistically better than they were a year ago.

**Q. First and second down, you know what you're going to get. Third down they may do anything. What is the challenge there?**

COACH FERENTZ: You do. The challenge is trying to get a manageable third down. And we didn't do a good job last year. But they really do a good job with the run attack. They allow around 100 yards, they are under 100 this year and slightly over it last year. But they make it tough for you to run the football. And if they can get you in predictable third downs, they do a good job there, too.

**Q. All the talk about the offense, what do you see from the quarterback?**

COACH FERENTZ: You can't understate it, he's a guy who's played and they've won with him. And there's a lot to be said with that. A lot of different ways to skin a cat and move the football and they've got a way that they've embraced for a long time. And typically their quarterbacks have been guys that maybe aren't in the spotlight as much, but they've done a good job of running the offensive. And it's all about scoring points no matter what you do and they're right at 40. That didn't happen by accident. They really do a good job.

**Q. You've competed against good running backs from Wisconsin over the years. What makes Gordon as good or better than prior years?**

COACH FERENTZ: They've had such a long list. And going back when I wasn't here, but the '90s, watching them, they had good backs then, too. And they've got a phenomenal skill set. You can see he's got personality. He's a really enthusiastic, energetic player, and very strong-

willed. And he's been able to stay healthy, too. That's no easy trick for a running back sometimes. And you combine all that.

But all that being said, to see someone do what he did last week, obviously hasn't happened. But the class that he entered was a pretty small class. It's a pretty elite group.

**Q. Can you talk about recruiting him and then losing him and what all went into that?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's like ancient history. He was we thought a great young man, outstanding prospect, didn't take Einstein to figure that out. He was good in high school, and he's even better now. So, you know, we dated for a while, he picked the home state school, which is usually not a big news headline. That's kind of the way it went.

**Q. When you get a commitment from a recruit, do you continue the same kind of recruitment?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we recruit until they sign. It's the nature of doing things. Until they sign it really doesn't -- nothing is binding, so you just keep recruiting.

**Q. You touched on a little of the health thing. Your guys at times seem jinxed, you get hurt.**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not a big jinx guy. We've had Fred Russell, two of the most prolific backs that we've had, Fred Russell and Shonn Greene. And Fred, for the most part, stayed healthy both the years that he ran for us and Shonn certainly did. He's the only guy in the country that year to do 100 yards that year every game.

And it's not as simple as just training and being dedicated. You have to do that. But it does take some good fortune, part of injury is there's luck involved or bad timing, whatever you want to call it. But you don't do it if you're not in great shape and not committed. Clearly he's done that.

**Q. Is there a talent of also not taking a direct blow?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Dorsett, when he was a freshman at Pitt, weighed under, I think it was about 160. But they had a hard time getting a square shot on him. If you weigh 160 you better have that ability, I guess, one of those deals.

**Q. Against Nebraska, just watching Gordon, what has he got?**

COACH FERENTZ: Like most people, I flipped the TV on when we got back to the house, it was 7:00. And the graphic was up there. There were four names of guys that have gone over 400, I believe. And L.T. was one of them. He's a pretty good back. And Faulk, I believe, was one of them. And a guy from Kansas. To have your name associated with those guys, it's a pretty good group. It just doesn't happen.

**Q. What do you need to do to attack that?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're on the drawing board right now. We certainly didn't do a great job last year. They pose a lot of challenges. They're very well coached. The defensive scheme is different than what they had prior to Coach Anderson being there. But the story is still the same. They play with great enthusiasm, toughness, they're where they should be all the time, very consistently. They play good leverage. They're tough, aggressive guys. It's a battle of wills. You really have to be detailed with what you're doing. And realize, too, you're not going to get a lot of big plays. They do a good job of making sure that you don't do that. You have to earn whatever you get. And if you don't realize that going in, then it could be a really frustrating day for you.

**Q. The linebacker is very active and puts up big numbers as far as pass rushing?**

A. Both those guys are good and, you know, there's different kinds of 3-4's. I'll throw that in there, too. So there are some that are really heavy on stunt go, and play to the zone, zone dropping, there's all kinds of ways to do it. They have five guys that can press you. They'll bring the inside guys, too, it's one of those flexibility items that the 3-4 gives you. Kind of mix it up.

**Q. Occasionally they've used two quarterbacks the last couple of weeks, what challenge is that?**

COACH FERENTZ: They've got a guy that can make you prepare for the running game. One guy is not really much of a runner, but a more prolific thrower. And the other guy runs the read option, or whatever you want to call it, with great

proficiency, and he's a big, big guy, and he's got more yards per carry than anybody on their roster. So it's one more thing you have to get ready for. It can show up at any time.

**Q. Are you happy with your run defense and what do they need to do to stop Gordon?**

COACH FERENTZ: The biggest thing I'm worried about right now is this week. We'll evaluate the whole season at the end of the season. But it's going to take a really, I don't want to say perfect, because that puts unreal pressure on you. But it's going to take our best football. We're going to have to play really well at all 11 positions.

You go back to the Pitt game the first half we didn't do that, and the ball came squirting out of there a bunch. And the second half we did a better job. We need to pick up where that one left off. It's easier said than done.

**Q. Do you talk about your team regarding the significance of this game?**

COACH FERENTZ: All these guys I think are smart enough to read the papers and know that stuff and do the math. But it really gets down to what we do this week. But it's all talk right now. It's like trying to figure out what bowl game you're going to go to. I think we will go to a bowl game. I wouldn't have said that a week ago. We have seven wins, pretty much a certainty we're going to go. To worry about where and when and all that stuff right now is wasting our time. Based on what I've seen on film, we better be more focused on the team we're playing than all that other stuff.

**Q. How does Nate Meier, who is undersized against Wisconsin's line, win the battle up front?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I haven't done any average on their line yet, but it's over 300, I know that. My recommendation is you stay real low, consistently. But that's the name of the game. I go back to **John (indiscernable)** who wasn't the biggest guy, one time I remember him getting really knocked out of there, Arizona State got him once. But if you're not a big guy then you better learn how to play with leverage, and certainly this would be a good week to make sure you're on top of your game.

**Q. How did Barry Alvarez build that, it's been a quarter century but a consistent model of excellence.**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm old enough to remember what it was like going up there in '89. It was not a very good environment, quite frankly, for the home team. It was a great one for the visitors. And he went there the year after. It didn't happen overnight, certainly. They've had their ups and downs like most people.

But they went in there with a plan and hired a great staff. They had a plan, a vision, and stuck with it and there are changes and tweaks as you go along, the bottom line is I think they've had good coaches. When I say coaches, not just head coaches, but staff. A lot of really good coaches have coached there. And certainly good players and a lot of guys that walked on there, a safety that picked us off in '04 and is still playing, I think. They've got a lot of players and good stories. Play hard-nosed football.

**Q. What separates them from the average football program?**

COACH FERENTZ: Other than what I just said, to me they've got a vision, and they've stayed true to it for the most part. They've tweaked things. They'll play to their strengths. The first-round receivers up there when they had them, they threw the ball to those guys pretty frequently.

So the parts may change a little bit and all that, the defense has changed, but the results are the same. And the characteristics that made them good have been pretty consistent. And I think that's again having a belief and when you do experience some things that maybe aren't what you had hoped for, you don't just sell the farm and go buy another one. They kind of stay with what they do and work through their ups and downs.

**Q. Do you think the two programs have similarities?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, I guess there's some parallels. It happened here 10 years earlier, I guess, or 12, 13 years earlier, whatever it may have been. Clearly there's a big change here in the late '70s. Barry walked into something different 13 years later, I guess it would have been, 12 years later, do the math, 11 years later. But, again, Coach Fry had a plan when he came here, and Barry certainly did the same thing. And if you want to build a family tree, they did the same thing

down at Kansas State, probably with a higher degree of difficulty, so it's a credit to all those guys.

**Q. How important will it be for your defensive backs to be sure-tacklers this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's going to be critical, because the ball is going to get to them. If you gain 400 yards it tells you that there have been some missed tackles, or broken tackles, you've got to really -- so everybody is going to really have to tackle well this week. The more guys we can get to them the better, but it's easier said than done.

**Q. Can Derrick Willies still be a part of this team if he would like to?**

COACH FERENTZ: I got asked that earlier, and you've got to excuse me, I was working all day today. I haven't had a chance to get on the message boards and stuff. I'm really worried about getting our team, the guys on the team right now ready for this ballgame. That's where my thoughts are right now. We have another game coming up right afterwards. That's where my focus is.

**Q. When Wisconsin recruited Gordon, they had so many good running backs, yet they've been keeping the promises and keeping them fed.**

COACH FERENTZ: They play a lot of guys. And they play a lot of backs. If you're a running back, I think it would be a really attractive place to go to school.

**Q. Not often you're an underdog at it's your home stadium.**

COACH FERENTZ: Not often we're playing a team that just had a guy go 400 yards on the ground. All you have to do is look at the stats, they score 40 a game, and we give up 15. My guess is they are going to be favored in a lot of ballgames.

**Q. You've played a lot of meaningful border games, but this one seems to be a little more respectful.**

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're built a little bit alike. I worked with Barry Alvarez, he's the first guy I interviewed when I came here in 1981, he picked me up at the airport. And then obviously Brett was on our staff. I don't know Gary well, but I've got a tremendous amount of respect for him. You put the Utah State film on and you can tell those guys have a good staff. We kind of knew what was going there. And so it's -- there's a lot of

respect, I can assure you from our end towards them.

You look at what they do. Our states are a lot alike, too, in probably some ways. Even their pro team. They've got a pro team, we don't. But you drive to the stadium, you come out of a neighborhood, and there it is, instead of being like in a metropolitan area. It's kind of neat.

**Q. You've built your offensive line a bit different than those guys. Is there something to have a bunch of bohemaths on the offensive line?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's like quarterbacks. There's a lot of ways to be effective and good at what you do. And they certainly have a formula that really has worked well. That's been a constant with their program, at least during my association.

I used to watch their films in the '90s. When I was in the NFL, I had access to it. Bill Callahan was a line coach, he was an excellent coach. And I used to enjoy watching the way they played up front, learned a lot from those guys. They've had a long tradition of that.

**Q. It's not just being big though.**

COACH FERENTZ: No, it doesn't matter what your size is. It's like Nate Meier in reverse. You are what you are physically. But there's a lot that goes into being a good blocker. And some people do it better than others.

**Q. Some teams lose they way you lost to Minnesota and kind of pack it in, your guys did not, is that something you expected?**

COACH FERENTZ: I fully expect that I can never say it, because you don't know what to expect it coaching or life. I see quotes all the time, I saw one from Duke Ellington, rule No. 1 is don't quit and rule No. 2 is don't forget rule No. 1. You have to get back up on your feet and go.

If you're naive enough to think you're never going to get knocked down, it might be tough as far as communicating. It's good to have confidence but if you're going to compete you're going to get knocked down, it's better to learn how to get back up.

**Q. Was the tight end involvement more of a function of the offense or did you make a thoughtful effort to get them involved.**

COACH FERENTZ: We didn't really do

anything differently, but it's -- I agree with your observation. We're a better team, especially this year, and we're a better team when the ball gets spread around a little bit and get the tight ends involved and the receivers get some opportunities to catch the football.

With all due respect, we don't have anyone that's going to run for 400 yards, so we need to utilize everybody we have. When we're playing well we can move the ball and score some points, and that's a good thing. But we need everybody working together for sure.

**Q. It's a bit of a misnomer, maybe to look at your line, maybe they haven't played as well as expected. But you don't have a back who can get through there maybe, especially with Canzeri being banged up. Is that over played how well they play?**

COACH FERENTZ: Again, I'll look at the whole team afterwards. Those guys are playing at a pretty good level. We've had some inconsistencies, that happens at any season, you try like heck to coach it and the guys try like heck to improve it, and I think that's true at every position.

Guys have had a great attitude going back to January and they work hard. Sometimes we're not always in sync the way we need to be. We really need to be working together. That's true of most teams, though, you're better off when you're doing that. So that's the goal this week again.

**Q. You've had selfless players in the past, but Mark Weisman seems to be willing to do anything any time, what does that mean to you?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we'll rank him at the end of the year where they're at. You think of some of the guys that have walked on here, Bruce Nelson, was just honored, Dallas was here at that game, they're best friends.

Mark kind of fell into our laps basically. And what we discovered while he was here, we knew a little bit about him before he came in. But we've had -- I just mentioned two guys that are world class people. And Mark is the same kind of guy. You hope your daughter brings him home -- a guy like that home, because he's almost too good to be true. He just works hard. He's probably too quiet and too humble. He's just wired that way. Boy, does he work hard. He's a tough minded guy

and a tough guy physically. You can't beat him. He's a great young guy.

**Q. He's been a durable guy?**

COACH FERENTZ: Which is how he got there. He ended up running the ball a little bit. He gets the most out of what he's got. He's a great young guy. Really a good football player.

**Q. Does Quinton feel comfortable playing in the middle?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think so, that's where he's worked the most. But some guys can move around a little bit and it doesn't affect them too badly, but now that Travis is injured, we're out of that option. But he's another guy that's a tremendous young guy, and really team oriented.

**Q. Is the simple difference between this years linebackers and last years linebackers just a matter of getting off blocks?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no, that's a part of what they do but being in the right position to get off blocks, and having the right leverage, all those kinds of things. And it's a process. And it's different for everybody.

But I'll go back to Anthony Hitchens, he made a bundle of tackles in 2012, yet was playing okay. I mean he was not in my mind a Big Ten candidate. Last year he was a bonafide, just a tackling machine. And that's experience and just getting there a little quicker, seeing things and anticipating things. It's a process. Some guys hit it in year four, some guys hit it in year two, but when you hit it it's a good thing.

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