

September 20, 2011



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Good news coming out of the game we're fairly healthy right now. I think we're in pretty good shape that way. Also, the guys that have been inactive with injuries are all progressing well based on what I'm hearing in our medical meetings.

Captains this week are the same four. Marvin McNutt, James Vandenberg on offense, Tyler Nielsen, Mike Daniels on defense.

Last week certainly was a real good win for us. It was almost like two different games, the first 40 minutes and then the last 20. Just pleased to get the win for obvious reasons, then we got a lot of work ahead of us. Think that was evident, remains evident. That's where our focus returns back to today, starting with Sunday.

Then with Louisiana Monroe, a tough opponent. A challenging game for us. They're a very veteran football team. Their schemes both offensively and defensively really pose some challenges for you. They're a little bit different, a little bit unique compared to what we've played in recent memory. We have some work to do there. On top of that, they have veteran players. They're athletic players, very tough, very competitive. So we got our work cut out for us this way.

If you look at their last ballgame against TCU, nationally ranked, 21-17 before the half, missed a field goal, could have pulled within one. Really played well. Unfortunately for them they gave up the opening kickoff. TCU was able to return that, got the short-field touchdown later on in the game. Tough, hard-fought game on the road. All we have to do is look at that film, look at our film, it's pretty evident we got a lot of work to do this week.

Q. When you look at the way James played in the fourth quarter when you had to throw the ball almost every down, a lack of depth at running back, do you get tempted to tweak things, throw the ball maybe more than you have in the past?

COACH FERENTZ: We're going to do whatever we have to do any given season to win, that's our plan. James played well, it was pretty obviously. The other part is the last 15, 20 minutes, we were in a bit of a quandary at our receiver position based on what we saw in August.

I think if there's been a real positive the last two weeks, our receiver group has taken some positive steps forward. We knew Marvin was the proven veteran player coming back. You have a couple different levels going on. Keenan the last two weeks has played a lot better. Kevonte surfacing, too, is helping us. The whole group caught the ball well in practice last week. That's really encouraging.

Q. Will you use more of that this week?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll do whatever it takes at any given point to try to help our football team. At one point, that was the best thing to do.

Q. As you watch the line, what do you see on the offensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't read everything, but I saw a few of Coach Graham's comments after the game. It was pretty evident what he said that was one of their things coming in, a current theme. You know, that's just what we're going to face. But I thought overall the line played okay. It wasn't like they were terrible. I don't think Markus (Zusevics) played terrible. I think he's continuing to improve with each week, too. At the end of the year all that stuff will balance itself out.

We'll play to whatever they try to take from us.

Q. What caused to hit the no-huddle button?

COACH FERENTZ: It was really no button. You look at the clock, at the scoreboard, you know, it was pretty much academic at that point. We needed to get going. That was good.

Probably the biggest break was I think when we pulled within 10, we got off the field in less than two minutes defensively. That's been overlooked, too. Getting the ball back, I can't remember where that put us on the clock, but we had ample time to put up 10 points at that point. Getting that stop was really big.

That was a positive, too. There were a lot of good defensive things that took place.

Q. Is Ken already going to no-huddle or do you say, let's change?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope we're not in that situation in the near future. I mean, the points were going that way and the clock was going this way. It was an academic decision there. Didn't know how many possessions we were going to have left at that point. Nobody did.

Q. Talk about the recruitment and development of Kevonte Martin-Manley.

COACH FERENTZ: In this day and age, it's a gamble. We let him play his senior year. Like Vandenberg and Stanzi. Evaluated him all through the fall. Alfred is the Joe Paterno of high school food. Almost 80, a great guy. He really endorsed Kevonte. I think Kevonte was committed or looking at a MAC school at that time. We really liked him. Came out with his mom and uncle for a visit in December. Looked like a good marriage. That's kind of how it all went.

Just good to see because he was really struggling in August. He had a foot injury. He was out there practicing, but he was just kind of a guy that was out there practicing. Didn't really differentiate himself. Good time to surface, that's for sure.

Q. What did you see in him that you liked?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a good player. I've told our staff at times, I'm not so sure we shouldn't, instead of not wasting time, but we invest an awful lot of time in recruiting, starting like on this class, we started last January in earnest even before our players and students came back on campus in January. I'm not so sure there aren't

times we shouldn't wait till December, try to raid the MAC commitments, get the All-Stars. I'm serious. There are like, what, 8 or 10 guys, played in the Super Bowl from the MAC Conference. There are a lot of good players in that league and all over the country.

Case in point, I'm not ready to, I don't know Kevonte is an All Big Ten player yet. I'm at the Big Ten luncheon, Kirk Cousins gives a speech, unbelievable. Nowhere to go in January. I'm not sure where Dan Persa was going when he was going to Northwestern. There are a lot of good players out there if you take your time and look.

Q. Who is your backup middle linebacker right now?

COACH FERENTZ: Tyler Nielsen.

Q. How is his health?

COACH FERENTZ: Okay. I think we're trying to make it to the bye week and see. I know neither of them are going to play this week. They're both getting closer. That's what I was trying to refer to with the inactives. All the guys are coming along. It's been up and down with Nolan and BJ, it's a matter what the x-rays and CT scan show this week.

We're hopeful we'll get him back. That will be good.

Q. Is Jordan Bernstine really starting to show you what you expected out of him?

COACH FERENTZ: He had a good spring last spring. When he played in that first game, special teams and on defense, really did a nice job. Couldn't go the second week due to an illness. Boy, he was flying around there. Continued that. I'm not saying it's a Jay Norvell story, but it's one of the ones we talk about here. Jay is a great story. Went four years without having a home here. Played three positions. Finally settled in at strong safety. In 1985, he ended up being co-captain, all league. If it works out that way for Jordan, that would be great. He really played a good game the other day.

Q. What made you move Dominic to the outside?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we've actually been playing him at two positions. I think probably our biggest thinking was, a young player, just get

him settled in one spot, see if he can focus on one thing. If that would help make his production a little bit better. That's kind of the driving force right there.

Tom Nardo has been doing a good job in practice. Tom really played a good game the other day. I think that helps. I think with the combination of Dominic and LeBron out there, I think that gives us. Have two guys split the duty. Dominic really did some good things out there, so it was encouraging.

We gave up some big plays defensively, but we made progress. That's a credit to that. But I think after looking at the film, maybe there's some hope we can develop into a decent defense here before it's all over. Two weeks ago, we looked like a bad junior high team.

Q. When you look at the bad fourth quarter struggles that happened last year, then Saturday at Pitt, what is the difference?

COACH FERENTZ: We played better, simple as that. Hopefully this will be a learning process. Just like when you go through it the other way, that's a learning process, too. See what happens.

But in '08, we broke the ice a little bit or broke through a little bit, pretty dramatic fashion, out in Kinnick. Maybe this will serve as an impetus. Time will tell. Felt good Saturday, I can tell you that.

Q. Does James Ferentz prefer to snap in shotgun formation?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I mean, didn't play center in high school, so I guess it doesn't matter. His high school team, they still run the ball, quarterback gets under center. He played center in the Shrine game. Both him and Vandenberg were under center and he was a center. So it was kind of interesting. Never happens anymore.

But, anyway, he's doing a decent job. There's no excuse not to do it quite frankly. It's something pretty much most of us can do. I don't know if we can block afterwards, but the snapping part is not hard.

Q. Broderick Binns had a really good game. Did he have a renewed focus in the off-season to change what he didn't do last year?

COACH FERENTZ: I've always considered him a starter. Mike (Daniels) emerged a year ago spring. I felt like we've had five guys,

the last two years, that were pretty good. Maybe in '09, wasn't as accurate. Last year I felt we had five guys that were starters.

He's had a good camp. Broderick is a great player, a good guy. We need him to be. We're counting on him like we're counting on Mike Daniels. He's a different build, if you will. But that's kind of our story. Klug was a different build for an interior guy. Broderick is not a guy that's 6'4", but he has the arms of a guy 6'6". Interesting matchup for a tackle. It's all good there.

Q. You always roll through your captains. Specifically what is it about those four guys that makes them stand out and stick with them?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not my choice. Our leadership group, they're the ones who vote every Sunday. Sometimes they just kind of settle in, which it looks like so far that's what we've done. The common denominator, they're all respected by their teammates. A peer group of about 15 there. It's been pretty consistent. Those four have separated themselves a little bit.

We have a lot of guys capable of leading our team and are leading our team right now. Those four guys have done a good job behind the scenes, too.

Q. When you went back and looked at the film, was there one turning point or play that jump-started the defense and offense from that Pitt game?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if there's one specific play. But certainly when we got it going there a little bit we scored a touchdown. That was a starting point.

I told the players afterwards the good thing was it was a team effort. It was just the offense doing something. Just as I went back, that stop, under two-minute stop, was really critical. Our special teams have gone from being like really pretty bad, our coverage teams, to we looked like a college team chasing down there in that fourth quarter.

We're not going to be a good team if we aren't doing that on a consistent basis. We can't keep riding the rollercoaster and putting our defense out there midfield. One thing I was really happy about Saturday was those last two kick covers. If we do that, we'll have a chance. If we don't, it's going to be a tough year.

Q. Some of the strengths and weaknesses for ULM?

COACH FERENTZ: Offensively it's almost like they have two separate offenses, if you will. They have two different styles of attack. Like the other day, they got off to a pretty good start against TCU. They played a couple quarterbacks. Both guys did well. I'm not sure how they're going to handle that.

They give you some unusual things that we're not used to seeing. It's going to eat up some practice time today, tomorrow, all week, to make sure we get everything covered. It's not the same, but a little bit like last week. If you don't have it covered, you're looking at big plays. That puts a hole in your boat real quick.

On the other side, it's a scheme defensively. Maybe we've played something like this in the last 13 years, I just can't recall. Michigan had a little different look the last couple years we played them, but this one is different than that. So it's going to cause us to really spend some time slowing things down, teaching it, making sure we get all 11 guys on the same page because it's a little different than what we normally see.

On top of that, they got a bunch of guys that are aggressive. They're good, aggressive, defensive football players. It's going to be a challenge, too.

Q. If you had to label the defense, what would you say?

COACH FERENTZ: They play three down linemen, I can tell you that. They play with three linebacker type guys. After that it's five DBs. It's a unique way of playing. Just a little different than what we see week in and week out.

I guess the analogy, if we were playing a wishbone team, it would be hold it, timeout, we have to walk through all this stuff a little bit. It's just a different thing, something different than we see normally.

Q. It will be your last game for two weeks. What do you want to see to have a good feeling going into that bye?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, we want to try to win the game. That's above everything else. The big thing, like anything, we have to improve. Our football team, I said that in the preseason, this is an important month for us. Not only in terms of like the results, but where we're going and what

we're doing. Same thing next week, too. We have got to keep our foot on the gas, try to improve. Certainly Saturday we had a lot of good teaching examples on the film Sunday of things we need to work on and clean up here.

Q. Zach Derby played a lot in the fourth quarter. What do you see from him to trust him? Has he elevated himself past Brad?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how everybody practices this week. The thing I would say, I made reference a few minutes ago about the receivers caught the ball better. I thought the last two weeks, particularly last week, every guy in the group, I don't think there's an exception. Even guys that didn't have catches Saturday, did a nice job catching the football. That's a progression, maturity thing and concentration. Same thing with tight ends.

The thing I would say there is Zach has just quietly, going back to last December, every time we're on the practice field, he's moving forward. It's not dramatic or anything like that. He continues to improve. He was playing the best Saturday, so that's what we went with down the stretch. Made a beautiful play down there.

But we'll see how this week goes with all three of those guys. Plan on playing all of them. We'll see how the week goes.

Q. How much does blocking determine who plays tight end?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, pretty much if you can't block, you can't play for us, or we'll put you out wide. If you're a tight end, that's not a tight end. We've done that, too, what have you. We do expect our guys to block. We expect our receivers to block, too. It's obviously different out there than it is in the box.

Players that can't do things, it hamstring what you're trying to do philosophically. When we recruit tight ends, we tell them blocking is part of the package. There are a lot of offenses where it isn't. They call them tight ends but they don't have to do that. All the guys that come here as tight ends, they understand that.

Q. I don't know if there's a special teams depth chart or whatnot.

COACH FERENTZ: It's not very deep either, other than the kicker position I told you. That's one thing I said, we missed a couple field

goals. Maybe I'll shut up on that one.

Q. What brought Joe Audlehelm to the top of the list Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: We review that and talk about that weekly like we do daily in some points. We go through all that stuff. It's kind of the same thing. Whoever is doing well stays in the game. If guys are struggling a little bit or somebody gets hurt, somebody has to go in.

Joe got his opportunity. The reference I've made twice, I'll make it three times now, Joe is a guy in practice that has always gone hard, a hard-nosed guy. I think of Warren Holloway, maybe that would be a good moment, too, if Joe finishes up with a TD catch. Warren was always running around, not always the right way, but hustling and doing things. He's popped up on a lot of our special teams highlight films through the years. Joe has given himself that chance. He got in there and made the best of his opportunity.

Q. How do you find special teams guys and reward them?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't read all the stuff that people write. He was on the bus at Iowa State. He had been hustling in practice. I don't even think he was on the second team that game. It was kind of a reward for the way he works. He got his chance. A lot of times what guys do in practice shows up in games.

Q. Are we going to see more of Bullock in the coming weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so, after he got that touchdown. I made that slip Saturday. I wasn't trying to be smart on Saturday. In my mind, especially after looking at the replay board, he'll be in, definitely be in. He's full speed ahead.

Q. Is their defense vulnerable to the running game?

COACH FERENTZ: You would think so. I mean, that's the first thought you have when you hear that. The one thing clearly, never say never, but pretty sure their whole deal is take the run away. If you look at them statistically, seems like a lot of people are doing that right now. We tend to be a run-stopping magnet.

They got a lot of guys down there. It gets pretty crowded in there. They may not have 70's number, but they get down, they all hit, they all tackle. They make it really hard to run the football, make it a challenge.

TCU had some success, but they also have an option element to their game which we don't have which really makes a big difference.

Q. Is Micah's move week to week?

COACH FERENTZ: I consider him right now to be our first or second team free safety. We'll see how things go. It's like every position, we'll let the guys compete and get our best 11 out there. At least we have some flexibility a year ago we didn't have. We'll see what happens. I know this week he'll be out there and we'll kind of go from there. It's nice to have that position flexibility.

Q. How difficult is it to run against this week? Is that a goal, get that running game back on track?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably bad week to set that one as a goal just based on the way they line up. Don't want to be set up for failure. We're going to have to get them to get out of there a little bit, otherwise we're going to average two a carry, be punting. At least our punter is punting well, don't want to jinx him either. But that's good.

Q. You've have a couple players hospitalized recently. Have you had a chance to touch base with their families?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes. It's been a tough year. We had a lot of unfortunate things happen. Gary Dolphin, the players you mentioned. All linked together. So we're supporting them all. It's hard. It keeping everything in perspective. No matter how the game came out Saturday, at the end of the day those things are real-life things that are really tough.

Q. With all the spread offenses, you guys being more of a balanced attack, does that make it more difficult to draw wide receivers in recruiting-wise?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, the other day we threw it for 400. We had basically three guys accounting for almost 400 yards offense. Alabama's Julius Jones looks like a pretty good player. Good players, I think they figure it out. It's interesting to me. Everybody comes in here, not essentially everybody, but Iowa is a run team. I think that's misleading. You do what you have to do to win. If we were an option team, I think that would be a different story. But we throw the ball to our receivers.

Pretty much our philosophy is if we have a guy who can make plays and help us move the ball offensively, we try to get the ball to them. We sit down at every meeting with that as a starting point. We try to get the ball to the best guys.

Q. Just your experience with high school receivers, you hear about running backs, we want the ball 25 times a game, what do you hear from receivers?

COACH FERENTZ: Not often. What I would add to that, whether it be a running back or receiver, most want to get to the NFL. There are things we can sell about our offensive team. The teams that throw it 80% of the time, they're selling the volume rather than the actual routes themselves or the way the guy runs the ball, that type of thing. Not many teams run the wildcat, other than the NFL.

Everybody sells what they got, to answer the question.

Q. Are you handicapped at all by not having a number of wide receivers in the NFL? I know that's a big selling point for recruits.

COACH FERENTZ: It might be. Or you can say it's an opportunity for you to be the fifth, eighth, whatever it may be. We have had guys play through here that have been okay, so...

Q. College football is moving towards super conferences. What's your opinion about what's happening in the ACC?

COACH FERENTZ: The only time I listen to the radio is when I go to my house, and that's

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