

**November 26, 2013**



An interview with:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. We have the same four captains. James Morris and Chris Kirksey defensively, Brett VanSloten, Mark Weisman on offense.

It's a quick week. Certainly have a big task on our hands playing a very good Nebraska team. We'll get on the plane here Thursday and head over there. In the meantime we got to really get some good practice in because they're a very good football team.

Last but not least, I want to congratulate Mike Klemmensen for being recommended with the Heroes Award, then also Caleb on the Nebraska side. What they did, and we're familiar with Mike's story, very amazing story, also very inspiring. I want to congratulate Hy-Vee again for the concept behind that. I'm sure a lot of people put thought into that. Most importantly for their support of and the recognition for really deserving people, people that truly are doing special things.

It's a great concept and hopefully it will develop into an outstanding series. One more compliment to the whole thing.

Throw it out for questions.

**Q. They've gone from having Taylor Martinez to a new quarterback. How does that affect your preparation?**

COACH FERENTZ: We have to prepare for whatever we see on film. I think it's a real compliment to their program. They've won eight ballgames thus far. I doubt there's an eight-win team in the country that's played with three quarterbacks.

I don't know how you plan for that. They've had other injuries and challenges as well. Everybody goes through that. When your quarterback goes out due to injury, that's a really

tough thing to handle. Martinez has had a tremendous career there.

They've transitioned pretty seamlessly. Done a wonderful job. Compliment to their coaches, players, everybody involved.

**Q. Have you developed a routine after playing Nebraska on the short week of Thanksgiving for the past three years?**

COACH FERENTZ: Coming out of the first year there were some things we definitely felt like we needed to tweak. Not that bad. There's always a couple things you look at. A little bit like bowl preparation.

I thought last year our preparation was good. The week was good as far as what we were trying to do. We feel comfortable this week.

If this was in the first half of the season, first quarter especially, it would be a real challenge. Second half of the season, six days is realistic. The players will be off on Saturday.

Selfishly, I'm not a huge fan of playing after Thanksgiving that week or the week of Thanksgiving. It's a pretty quiet campus right now. If there is any upside, a couple upsides actually, one of the nice things I think is that the players, roughly 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 on Friday will have a chance to go home if they live locally. That's a good thing. They'll get a little time away from everything.

**Q. Are unsung plays what make a team, such as Adam Cox's hit during Mark Weisman's touchdown?**

COACH FERENTZ: They are. I always joke nobody cares who the right or left guard is. Guards are anonymous. Fullbacks probably even more so in that regard. Yet you can't play without them.

In our case with fullbacks, there are a handful of teams that actually still use fullbacks. Adam and Macon have done an outstanding job.

Scout team players a year ago. Great guys to have in the program. They really worked extremely hard in the spring at making the transition.

Not only are they doing a good job, they're doing an outstanding job. Probably the best duo we've ever had at that position. They go pretty much unnoticed. But they don't go unnoticed by us as coaches and certainly by their teammates. Guys that have earned a lot of respect. Just really happy for both of them, the success they're having.

**Q. Is there a point where you say you guys have turned the corner in the program?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. We have two games to go. There's so many things that can happen. We're just going to keep pushing forward. Really the only thing we're worried about right now is from here to Friday. That's about all we can concern ourselves with.

We've been getting judged all along. I'm sure we'll continue to be judged. But it's like I said back in the spring or even in August, let's wait till the book's finally written, then go back and look at it.

**Q. What growth do you see in Nebraska's defense over the course of the season?**

COACH FERENTZ: They got hit with graduation a little bit, especially at the linebacker position. They've had some really good linebackers the last couple years, veteran guys.

They played a mismatch of people, especially in the first part of the year. I think they've settled into who they are, what they are now.

If you look at them, the last four or five games, they've really found what home base is. They've had to make some adjustments defensively as we talked about. Offensively they've settled in. The defensive end is doing a really good job. Their guys inside are stout, tough to block. I think they've got the linebacker thing, they're settled where they're at now. Their secondary is good. Big, physical guys that cover well. They're a good defensive football team, for sure.

**Q. Is there a running style that helps a running back avoid injuries or benefits them**

COACH FERENTZ: They're more of a perimeter team than we are. Their attack lends itself that way. That probably benefits.



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One thing about injuries, I mean, in fact, we just had a younger guy have surgery yesterday. Just basically doing a jam drill, had a pretty significant injury that required surgery.

There's really no way. But certainly I think the amount of carries, inside carries, that's tougher than probably being on the edge. But anything can happen to anybody out there on the football field. It's just part of the deal.

**Q. How much have you seen Nebraska rely on their running back through the season?**

COACH FERENTZ: They've had a lot of things going on at the quarterback position. The one thing that's been constant, they're good on the perimeter. They have excellent receivers. They run well, catch well, block well. Their running back is as good as you're going to find anywhere in the country. They've had some things to hang their hat on certainly.

With the moving parts, those guys have been constant. They've really done a good job.

**Q. When you see a team attack the perimeter like that, what can you do to combat that?**

COACH FERENTZ: You have to play team defense. It's going to be tough. They make you honor everybody and everything. It's always a challenge to play them.

**Q. Seeing the team be successful in the latter point of games despite turnovers, how good is that to see?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you typically don't survive a game with four turnovers. To me, three turnovers and two field goals that materialized.

Yeah, one of the turnovers was a pick-six. Those are a lot of points that I don't want to say we gave up, but it's not what you're looking to do.

To survive that, I think the one thing you can point to right away is our defense gave us a chance to overcome the parts that weren't so clean. They did an amazing job.

But you don't want to put that in the blueprint, for sure. It was a great job of responding to a tough situation. But I know this: if we turn it over four times this weekend, nobody is going to be smiling coming out of the stadium. It won't work. You just can't do that.

**Q. Will Macon Plewa be able to go in this week? How about Dominic Alvis?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's got a chance. I think so. He played a couple plays. Didn't have a back ailment, but got kicked in the abdominal area. Took the wind out of him literally.

Dom practiced yesterday. Macon is day-to-day, probably a game-day decision.

**Q. How do you think playing well on the road against Ohio State and others has helped you this season?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think we've played well on the road. We're 3-1 right now. As big a challenge of any, on paper would be the first one. You have a quarterback that's never played in a hostile environment like that. I thought he did a good job of handling that, ran our team.

But I think overall we've played well on the road. We haven't come up undefeated, but we've played well, handled the trip well.

The circumstances, this one's a little different because there's no students on campus right now to start with. We're not in class. It's one more set of challenges.

I think that's probably a sign of the maturation, sign of the leadership we're getting. So there's reason to believe we have a chance to handle this one better than we had maybe in the past.

**Q. After the game against Michigan you said you were seeing a lot of growth from the team. Would you say the growth is more on the offensive side of the ball?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say yes and no. I think it was a team thing really. We were obviously making it tough for ourselves. The offense was sputtering a little bit.

The defense kept us there, and the special teams kept us involved, too. That's one of the beauties of football. I've heard this said before by a coach I really admire: There's nothing 50/50, and team football is rarely 50/50. If one area is struggling, somebody else has to compensate, help you get through that tough time.

I think that's really what took place. The defense gave us a chance to make it a doable game. We hit a big play coming out of the half. Now you're right back in it.

Everybody is hoping to do that if you're in that situation, but this time we made it work. So a lot of credit to go around. That's the beauty of

football. It takes everybody collectively staying the course. You got to keep playing.

The good thing is, I mean, that's part of football. You're always going to be in tough situations. We'll be in them again Friday. How do you persevere in those situations and play through them without throwing away all the things maybe you believe are important.

**Q. Bo Pellini is under fire despite pretty successful seasons. What do you think about that?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's just an American pastime, I think. I think it's nothing more than that. Probably about all I can say.

They have two chances to get nine right now. Based on the way they've played us historically, their chances are good Friday.

**Q. Do you think if you had nine wins five years in a row, going on six, things would be similar here?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it's all relative. One thing that's usually common in sports, it's never enough. It's all relative to where you're at, what level you're at, that type of thing.

That's a common denominator nationally in all sports, not just football.

**Q. Do you think you would be in trouble here if you won nine games six years in a row?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know that. I'd like to find out, put it that way. How is that (laughter)? Like to find out.

I'm just saying complaining about whatever is pretty common in sports. I think that's one thing that attracts it in some sick way. When Baltimore won their first Super Bowl, not enough offense. Tampa Bay, not enough offense. Chicago Bears in '85, not enough offense.

The idea is to win. You want as much as you can.

**Q. I don't remember 20 years ago a coach with that kind of résumé that would be under the same scrutiny.**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not totally, I don't want to say, naïve, but blind to all the things that get written. There's so many more avenues now than there used to be. I say that half jokingly.

Thirty years ago most of the talk was going

on at the barbershop, the local tavern, the diner, coffee shop, wherever it may be.

Now there's just a lot more avenues for expression. I think a record high amount of experts and commentators. There's just more talk. Everything is more visible. Twenty or 30 years ago when I was here, if you played in the CBS game, that was a big deal because that's about all there was.

With all that talk and all that expertise out there, I think it's just natural that people have more opinions about things.

**Q. What do you like about playing Nebraska each year?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's a great challenge, first and foremost. When they joined the conference, not unlike Penn State joining in the early '90s, you had a real quality football program, a quality institution, but a quality football program to the conference, traditional program.

You look at the record at Nebraska. Bob Devaney went there in the early '60s, what they did through '97, it's amazing. Three national championships in the '90s. That was a quite a feather in the cap from a football standpoint in the conference.

For us to have a chance to go line up against people like that, it's a great challenge.

But that makes our conference stronger. It makes the competition stronger. It's probably not coaches and their job security. But that's the nature of sports, too. It's made our conference I think a stronger conference.

**Q. How much do you think a coach's personality plays into the hiring and firing of coaches?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say the same thing there. My experience is if you win enough. That guy is good, he's got his emotions under control. When the record gets flipped around, that guy doesn't have any emotion. That's the whole problem.

We've read those stories in the NFL. Whenever a coach gets fired, they need the opposite personality type next. At least that's what the players always say.

But the world is full of all kinds of different personalities. Go back and look historically, football is what I know better. There are a lot of differences in personalities between coaches, but usually the guys that are successful record-wise, they're the ones that tend to be recognized as the

best. Whether they have a low-key demeanor like Tony Dungy, obviously that was part of the problem in Tampa, not part of the problem in Indy. That's a great illustration right there. Team that he put together went on and won the Super Bowl. Tampa Bay, too. He had the right deal. That's his personality. Coaches have to be who they are.

**Q. And the Wisconsin/Minnesota rivalry?**

COACH FERENTZ: My problem is it's kind of been one-sided, recent history. We're 1-4, '70s, '80s. 0-2 when I got here. 0-2 recently. It's probably the kind of rivalry they like. It's our job to try to do something about that. That's what we got to do.

**Q. Among other things, do you consider the fact that Iowa hasn't won, can that be used as a positive motivation?**

COACH FERENTZ: If we played them every year, that would be really concerning. What happened even in '79 really doesn't impact this team right now. What happened last year doesn't impact this team at all.

It's another challenge for us certainly. We haven't played there an awful lot, especially since they put facemasks on helmets. Last time they pretty much dominated the game in every phase.

We need to step it up and do better. That's our challenge right now.

**Q. What is your itinerary coming back Monday?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll meet as a team first thing Tuesday morning before classes, just vote on captains, things like that. Get together after the weekend.

They'll start training. They never kind of get away from training. It will be a little bit lower key. We'll practice sometime next weekend, for sure.

The one thing about it, I don't know the date of this game last year, I think it was like the 21st, 22nd, something like, that the calendar falls funny this year. No matter where we go, it's going to happen fast. Finals are late. I think graduation is the morning of the 21st. We'll be traveling somewhere that afternoon. If we're in a January bowl, a little bit later, it's going to be a scramble drill probably all month.

**Q. Do you do anything for Thanksgiving?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, Wednesday is Thursday. Coach Fry would love this. Hey, we're on the West Coast so it's really 10:00, not such and such o'clock.

Today is like a Wednesday for us. Tomorrow we'll pretend it's Thursday, have turkey, have a nice team meal. Any family members that want to volunteer will be there.

Thursday we'll just travel, treat it like a travel day, a normal Friday. Watch other people eat turkey, I guess.

**Q. What areas of Jake Rudock's game have you most impressed?**

COACH FERENTZ: First thing that comes to mind is how he handles whatever is in front of him. Saturday is another example. As you probably know, we didn't game plan that first play to come out the way it did. Couldn't have been more disastrous.

First half was a rough first half for us. Topping it off, he's a southern Florida kid playing in what I heard is called Kinnick weather. Nothing seems to affect him. He had an organic chemistry test last Wednesday. Whatever is in front of him, he works through it, grinds through it.

He's really a mentally tough guy, physically tough guy. I think he's just continued to really impress us with everything that fazes him. He's got another big challenge this week, we all do.

**Q. You mentioned in regard to a lot of players, the amount of snaps they've taken. Guys like defensive tackles, Louis and Carl, they're upwards of 600.**

COACH FERENTZ: Played a lot. It's probably a little higher than that. Louis I'm sure is leading that charge right now. He really comes off. Linebackers, they have special teams pretty much every play.

**Q. . What do you compare Carl Davis to?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. That's a good one. We really haven't had someone like Kroul. When he and Scherff showed up, Colin Cole I think was the biggest recruited guy we brought in. Both those guys were bigger than Colin when he showed up.

They both have been a work in progress. Carl is a little bit behind Brandon because of his injuries because of time. He's done a good job.

He's a little bit different. He's not Mitch obviously, some of the guys we've had. But he's really playing well. Really happy. That group up front, compared to a year ago, they've come a long, long way. They're not flashy, but they're tough. They work hard. They give us a chance to do some good things defensively.

He's really progressed. All those guys kind of have their own roles and they're doing a good job.

**Q. You talk about snap counts. Carl might have had 60 coming into this year. Now he has more than 600. What do you think of that increase?**

COACH FERENTZ: He barely played. He was an infant coming in.

We saw it in the spring. He really looked like he took that step where he could handle it. A lot of football. Unless you're one of those guys that falls off the gifted truck, a lot of it's guys developing, really working through.

He's always had ability. That hasn't been an issue. It's just maturation, learning how to play, doing those types of thing. Great thing about it is he can get so much better, and he will because he's got a good attitude, he's a delightful young guy. He gives us a little personality, too. He's got a little spirit to him.

**Q. Is Carl Davis one of Chris Doyle's biggest projects?**

COACH FERENTZ: Carl came to us with some pretty good attributes. He was just young. Same thing about Brandon. Chris does a great job. What he does in terms of coaching is really good from my vantage point.

But the guys that have done well, it just goes back to what they invest. The guys that really truly believe and invest, then live it, are the ones that improve the most. I think all the guys hitting the field right now are evidence of that.

**Q. Carl's ride's kind of coincides with Reese Moring coming in? What is the correlation there?**

COACH FERENTZ: We had some options. The way I've always tried to do things, you try to get the best coaches, the people you think are going to be the best fits in the program. Get them in the right chairs, worry about that later on.

The one thing, this goes back to 15 years ago, 14 and a half years ago when we hired Reese. One thing we knew we were getting a tremendous teacher, evidenced by what he'd done in several programs high school-wise.

None of this stuff is rocket science. It's more about getting teachers and teaching the right things. Reese has done a great job. You look at how inexperienced we were a year ago, including Reese. That was his first year of coaching that group. Not that we're the Purple People Eaters or The Steel Curtain right now, but I think we can hold our own up front right now.

Reese has done a great job of teaching. Teaching is not right foot, left foot, it's also the mind part of it, getting guys to believe in themselves.

That's always been his strength. I've witnessed that with the tight ends, now the defensive line. He's just a tremendous football coach.

**Q. Mark Weisman looks healthy. Is he back to close to full strength?**

COACH FERENTZ: He certainly looked better. I promise you, I'm no medical expert. I don't know crap about it. But Mark did very little during the bye week. He just to me looked tired. I thought Damond looked tired.

Without too much scientific evidence, those two guys, especially Mark, go ride the bike, watch. That guy worked so hard. He can't go half speed. I'm not saying he's Bob Sanders, but there's a little bit of that too. We put him over in the bullpen for a while.

**Q. You estimated in the summer that the 2014 recruiting class would be in the high teens or twenties. Is it still about right?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's next year's class. I swear to God, another school in our conference just got a guy 15 or 16. So what grade is he in right now? I can't keep track of this stuff.

Basketball, they go by falls or winters? When they say a guy is in what class, that's even worse. Good thing I'm not a basketball coach.

We're probably looking at 20, ballpark. I'll know more in a month or so.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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