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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, first of all. Good to see everybody. Start out just by congratulating a couple of our colleagues). Lisa had a great season with her team and made a great, great run after a tough start and certainly Tom Brands, congratulations to all of the wrestlers. What a great year they had. Really happy for them.

And needless to say, just sorry about the situation that developed with Todd Lickliter. Todd has been a great friend and will continue to be, and I have got tremendous respect for him as a basketball coach. You know, it didn't work out, obviously, the way anybody wanted it to, but I don't think there's any question about Todd's coaching abilities, integrity, just a tremendous coach and I wish him and his family all the best, certainly.

You know, more recently here, our seniors Monday -- we had our pro day on campus, and a lot of the guys were at the Combine a couple of weeks back. I think it went pretty well for them on Monday.

So it's an exciting time for them, real busy time and they will be pretty anxious here I think for the next month until the draft, so we certainly wish them well, too, so just some stuff on the periphery.

As far as we go, just good to get started. We are excited to get back on the field. You know, this is an important phase for us in terms of football, and certainly it's a new season. All of us were pleased with the way things turned out last year and the finish, certainly in, January. But this begins a whole new chapter for us, and you know, any time you have a good football team, which we

did last year; we lost a lot of key players, key guys that gave us a lot of leadership, so that's part of the process.

We have a lot of good football players coming back that are I think going to really emerge as good leaders among those that accepted that role over the last year, year and a half. But we have a lot of work to do right now. I think we are all aware of that and anxious to move into this next phase.

I think the winter program went well. Chris Doyle and his staff do a great job with our guys every year. I think that was a successful step for us. And these next 15 days on the field and in the meetings are very important because time is very limited and we really need to maximize those. So we are anxious to get back to work, get started. We will start today and by Sunday, have four workouts in, so got to handle this first phase pretty well.

Just on the injury front, bring you up-to-date a little bit. We have some guys that will not be participating. A couple repeat guys, safeties, Tyler Sash and Brett Greenwood both had shoulder repairs this January. So they are going to be out in spring. Their rehabs are going very, very well. Kyle Haganman, same thing, one of our offensive line, he'll be out. Steve Bigach had knee repaired, not an ACL but just a little bit different kind of surgery. He's doing fine on his rehab. He will not practice. Adam Robinson had some shoulder tweaks back during the season, one in the bowl game and ended up having to repair that, so he will be out as well.

On a more positive note, Paul Chaney's rehab is going very well. He will be very limited and we expect him to be full speed by June. And Jewel Hampton has been cleared to practice. We will keep his work limited, as well. He won't get tackled but he will do some contact work and not get tackled. And I don't know how much our backs

will get tackled in general. That's been the long and short of it right now.

Spring ball has been an exciting time. We have some areas of new development we know that. We have some areas of new strength and we have to develop some depth, and this is a real period of opportunity for not just the younger guys but all of our guys, like Clayborn and Stanzi that really established themselves; and they have a chance to improve and that's what we are counting on and they also contribute to the attitude of the team. We are excited about getting started and I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. You mentioned Jewel, sounds like the rehab is going good, you have a pretty good stable of running backs?

COACH FERENTZ: It is, and it's that way for everybody right now. I think Jewel showed us an awful lot two years ago and everybody, a lot of people were ready to anoint him as the next Shonn Greene. I think that was a little premature quite frankly.

I think he's proven that he can compete very well at this level. I thought he did a lot of good things. The best thing about it was he really improved during the course of that season, the '08 season. I thought he was a much better player the second half of the year than the first.

So, you know, he's going to be right in the thick of it and I was real impressed with both Adam and Brandon last year. I thought they did a great job. Both of those guys got better, too, as the year went on.

So our first goal is to get more than two guys to the game. We have had a hard time doing that, unfortunately. It's a real luxury item when we have three backs, so if we can get to that point, that would be great.

The only thing I know is competition is great at any position, and that is one position where we will have good, healthy competition, if things pan out. We'll see what happens. But hopefully it's going to be a good situation for us.

Q. Offensive line, that's going to be an area --

COACH FERENTZ: A big focal point certainly for us. You look at our tight end position, we feel really good about Allen Reisner. He played extremely well, I thought, when Tony was out last year for that prolonged period.

But after that, we have a lot of question marks there, so I think that position is in

competition right now. You throw in the linebacker position, they are probably going to be the prominent areas of figuring out who our starters are going to be and what our depth looks like.

And I think our offensive line, we probably have eight or nine guys competing for the top spots. It's going to be interesting and we are equally interested to see who is going to emerge behind Reisner at tight end because we would prefer to play at least a couple guys out of the gate, capable of having two ends out there; whether or not we have that luxury or not, we'll see.

It will be interesting to see what happens. We have a lot of guys on pretty equal footing as far as the competition goes. On the injury front, I should probably mention this, ties in a little bit, Dominic Alvis, he's nursing a groin injury, so not sure how much we'll get out of him this spring. He's a young defensive lineman and we were hoping to get a good look at him. I'm not sure we are going to get that.

Then flipping it over to the offense, Nolan McMillan, a guy that had some injury problems during the second part of the fall last year, but hopefully he'll be in contention hopefully for a line position. He's coming off of sports hernia surgery that he had back before the bowl, so he's working his way back. He's not full speed yet. I don't know if he will be in a week or two. We are hoping he can be. I was hoping he would be back where he would be in the competition, too, and see where he fits in in terms of the one through ten.

Q. How did you come up with the first O-line depth chart?

COACH FERENTZ: Throwing darts, basically. Clearly Dace and Julian both played good football for us for the most part of the year last year, and Julian had that injury, which it took him a while to get back but he was really playing well at the end of the year. And then I thought Riley played as consistently as anybody we had last year, so he did a nice job; for him being a first-year player, really did a good job.

After that, we are pretty much just flipping coins right now and depth charts don't mean a lot at this point, but hopefully we'll be further along here in four weeks, and more importantly, hopefully by September, you know, we'll have a good idea where we are heading.

Q. The experience, five years in the weight room --

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. The reality is, probably, I think it would be fair to predict. There's probably a good chance four or five guys that have graduated in the last two years on the offensive line will be competing next year in the NFL or on rosters and practice squads. So you know, we have had some pretty good guys the last two years. You go back, Bruggeman and Olsen were both good players and like I said it's probably safe bet that three of the guys are going to end up landing a spot in the NFL.

You see five guys of that caliber in two years, you're going to pay a price. Flipping it around, the hottest guys in contention right now, the hottest contention, are guys that have been in the program a couple of years.

So you know, it's not like we are -- I don't think they are two miles away from things. I think they are approaching where they need to be. We are not going to be as big as we were last year, I know that, physically, but that's fine. I think potentially we'll have guys who can play. Zusevics is going into his fourth year. He's not going to be a 320-pound player but that's okay. He's got the potential. He's improved with each year. Same thing about Gettis; Hundertmark, we moved over in December and he really, I think it is going to be a great, great move and he seemed to learn very, very well, very quickly.

I think we are going to have some good competition, and I'm not overly concerned. I'm anxious and curious to see how things play out here in the next four weeks. It will be fun to watch everybody compete. And I mention Nolan McMillan a while ago; I think he has a chance to compete with our tackle group.

Again, competition will really help. We have a tier of guys in that younger group, last year's freshman, guys like Boffeli, Van Sloten, who have shown some good things. It's a matter of -- I don't know how close those guys, but probably going to be in two-deep. They have to get going.

Q. How is Jordan Bernstein's progress?

COACH FERENTZ: Healthy. He practiced pretty much full speed down in Florida in December, but obviously, you know, at that point we had red shirted him, so he was out of the mix from a playing standpoint. But he's fine, and we have got one corner spot open. Really, we have two -- we have 22 spots open. Prater had a good

year, good experience and it's going to be interesting to see who emerges at the other corner, between Jordan and Micah Hyde, Greg Castillo, we have some pretty good competition in there. It will be fun to watch those guys compete.

Q. When you start hearing outside comments, how do you manage expectations?

COACH FERENTZ: It's the same old story. This is a new season for us, new team. We know this. We have some very good players back and that will drive expectations. You know, preseason polls are a lot like recruiting ranks. They are all speculative, you know, based on -- recruiting rankings are based on what guys did in high school, which is the only way you can rank them. I think preseason rankings are based on your experience level, your success level and then maybe the name of your school, too. So those three things factor in.

But really don't have much to do with how we play next year and our 12 games. We have got a lot of work to do right now and to replace guys like Pat Angerer, A.J., go right down the list, we lost some really good players that really brought a lot to our program, and you know, we have got some work to do, we know that.

So you know, historically, those preseason polls -- outside of maybe the name-brand schools, the preseason polls are usually not real accurate.

Q. With Ricky as your starting quarterback, how important is spring for James and John?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if he's entrenched, but he's got the most experience. Spring is big for every guy. Right now we have a lot of guys operating at different levels. I just mentioned guys like Van Sloten, Boffeli, Drew Clark, guys like that are right now, they are not ready to play, I can tell that you, based on what I know, at least. What they need to be doing is trying to run closer to that point and every practice is really important for them. You have a guy like (inaudible) who is on a different level, trying to earn a starting job. That's a different level of achievement maybe or what-have-you. But those practices are important to him, too. If guys like Stanzi and Clayborn are thinking right, they are going to be working every bit as hard as those guys trying to be the best they can be at their position. They should be the best on our roster. I

don't know if they will be, but they should be.

But you know they are competing against everybody in the country, too, if they are thinking right, and I think they are, both those guys. You look at a guy, James Vandenberg, we all saw he's got some great potential and I know he's going to compete this spring and that's going to make Ricky a better player because I know Rick is going to answer that competition. They all have different things they are focusing on, but if guys are thinking right, they will be competing hard and trying to not only earn a starting job but be the best we can be. I think that's ultimately what we are hoping for.

Q. How is Daniel Murray and is that job open?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, he's fine. He's fine. Outside of being ugly, he's fine, ugly play. All jobs are open right now and that's an area, statistically, I don't even know -- we can do better at that position.

You know, Trent has had good experience. We have a unique situation. We have two guys that have played a lot at that position. It's going to be straight-up competition. It was last year, too. It just worked out that Daniel won the job and afforded us the opportunity to redshirt Trent. I think that's a straight-up competition right now.

Q. Talk about linebacker and filling those two spots.

COACH FERENTZ: We have got a lot of flexibility, I think, with our guys. You know, we have really been pleased the way Tarpinian has come on, start with him. I think he made every tackle on the kickoff team, in the bowl game, or at least seemed that way. We saw his confidence level grow and improve, same thing with Troy Johnson, one of the good stories last year. We ended up going down to our third guy in the Minnesota game and he ends up being Big Ten defensive Player of the Week. He steps in and does a good job. He got nicked up a little bit. He's really grown and did a nice job on special teams. I single him out on our kickoff team, as well.

I think we have a lot of guys that are growing. Tyler, we saw him growing on special teams. I think it's going to be a good competition. Quite frankly I'm almost more worried about a year from now at our linebacker spot. Sounds kind of funny, with two pretty good seniors graduating, but we are top heavy age-wise.

Not sure how it's going to shake up this spring but I think we are going to have good line

backers and it's really important we get some younger players in here next year to help, you know, looking forward for two years from now I think we are going to be fine at linebacker.

Q. Does that mean you almost look at not redshirting a couple of the linebackers you've got just to get them in there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think it's fair to say we will probably try to get one or two of those guys involved in special teams. They have got to prove that they can do it, too. We are not going to do it just because we want to. They have to prove they can. I think looking down the road that's something we are thinking about.

Q. Derby is coming in, a true, true, true freshman. What do you throw at him right away?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, he'll jump in like the rest of the guys, and you know, how much work he gets at the front end of practice, we'll wait and see. But he's handled the rigors of class and all that stuff. I don't think he got too home sick. That's one good thing. But otherwise I think he's handled everything pretty much pretty well. This will be a whole new step. His head will start spinning pretty good here the next few days and that's fine. That's part of the process.

I've said before, I'm not a huge fan -- I'm still trying to figure out, quite frankly, why NCAA legislation allows guys to come to college early. I just -- I don't think I quite get it. I think I do get it and know why coaches advocate for it, but I'm not in favor of it. And we don't push it with our guys, but we do have two guys, A.J. and Louis Trinca-Pasat, and they both handled it fine, but I'm not sure it's good for, you know, if I was the commissioner of sports, I think I would change that rule. But you know, that's probably the end of that one, because we all know I'm not the Commissioner of sports; nor do I want to be.

Q. Is he in on meetings?

COACH FERENTZ: He's in. He's in and going. Those guys have been in throwing and all that stuff and the older guys are great with the younger guys, so that part's good. Once you get into practice and it really kind of -- it's different. It's just really different. So I'll predict he's going to be lost here for a little bit. But that's fine. You go through that process at some point, but we are not

counting on him to save our team right now, but I think he's a real good football player and we're really happy he's here that's for sure.

Q. At this stage, who is better, James or Brian at this stage?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, time will tell. Time will tell. I was thinking about -- Josh or -- I gotcha. I'm with you.

Q. Clay born came on towards the end of last season, got a lot of national publicity, you saw guys like Suh from Nebraska and McCoy talked about a lot since they are out of school now. Does Adrian have that potential to be talked about on the national level like those guys?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and certainly as you know he plays different positions. He's on the outside. I think he does. That's one thing I did look up. I think there were three nominees or whatever it was, I think it was the Lombardi, and they were all seniors last year.

Adrian is one of the better players we have had, and like most good players, he really improved each and every year. You know, last year, he kind of used the bowl as a showcase but he did some things during the year that were really exceptional. And beyond that, what he does on the practice field, really makes us a better team, because he's got a great attitude.

I think I mentioned in the past, one of our Kodak Moments last spring was on a Friday. I can't tell you, the second week I think, we had a couple defensive tackles get nicked up and both he and Christian jumped inside, which, first of all, outside guys, they are not always wild about going inside. But they did it without anybody saying anything. They just did it. And that to me kind of indicated we got some guys thinking right here, and then as we know, Christian ended up moving in their full-time back in camp.

So I guess the point I'm trying to make there, Adrian thinks right and it's been fun to watch him really emerge and grow as a leader. Last year he really assumed a strong leadership role. I would say with Pat graduating and A.J. graduating and certainly if you had star guys, which I do, if you asked them to name one guy right now defensively, it's Adrian. And right behind them is Klug. Klug really played well and wasn't far behind him in the bowl game; he just wasn't quite as visible to the casual fan.

So the answer to the question, yeah, I think Adrian, yeah, he should be in. Assuming he keeps progressing and playing like he has, he'll be one of the best in the country and feedback I got, he would have been a first round pick this year, so maybe, you know, a year from now, he'll be even higher, which I think he will be.

Q. Do you feel you have more depth this year than you've had in the past?

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily. Just kind of shifts around. Tight end is a good example. Last year we had two guys to me that were Big Ten starters and right now we got one. So it's an illustration and we are not sure where we are at after the first guy, and that's going to be a real focus, how that shakes out this spring. We have got guys that are willing and I think very able, but they have got to do it and demonstrate it now, and that's what we haven't seen over a prolonged period, instead of just flash.

I think our hot spot just kind of moves around right now. We feel confident. We've seen two guys play in games at quarterback that we feel good about and that's a good feeling, haven't had that happen a lot.

Then running back, we talked about that, we feel pretty good there. So many things going between now and September that can happen during the course of a season, where, you know, you think you are okay here and then two days later it looks like something totally different. So you know, that's part of the challenge of a season, too, was just how you handle the highs and lows.

Q. And is Keenan Davis, is his development ready now for it?

COACH FERENTZ: He's really done well. I would compare it a little bit like A.J. Edds, he played a lot his freshman year, true freshman year, but he played a lot and I think that year really benefitted and gave him confidence that following spring, and we are hoping to see that with Keenan. I think we should. I think he's a more mature guy than he was, obviously, and he's certainly more comfortable with what he's doing. We hope to see him at a whole different speed this spring and we are optimistic we will. It's important, it's like the linebackers, I think we have four senior receivers right now and we need some young guys stepping up their game. Marvin played well last year, especially well at times, but he's still learning and

his best football should be in front of him. With a little bit of luck, he'll have this coming year like Clayborn did last year where he really starts to play consistently at a level we think he's capable of.

Q. Can you talk about Colin Sandeman and his role and where you see him fitting?

COACH FERENTZ: Colin's big problem last year was just injuries. Unfortunately had a tough year that way, but when he's been in and been healthy, we have all seen he can do some really nice things, starting with punt returns. And then the bowl game, we got a glimpse of what he's capable of doing. Another Kodak Moment, I've got that draw that Adam Robinson broke back in the Arizona game. He was downfield blocking, doing a nice job there, so not just receiving, and we are hoping that he'll -- it's his fifth year, his senior year. We are hoping that he really hits the gas pedal and goes, too. He should.

Q. The Board of Regents this week is discussing a proposal that would require athletic departments to not use any state funding; can you comment on what you think of that proposal and why it may or may not be a good idea?

COACH FERENTZ: It doesn't affect us and that's just kind of the way it's worked out. My personal comment, I think it would be unfortunate. But, you know, that's not my decision to make and what have you.

I coached at the University of Maine for three years, and you know, I'm not politically astute enough to tell you what aid we got from the state, if we got any. I know dollars are tough to come by. They were tough to come by when I was at Maine.

I can tell you that I think there's a real value in intercollegiate athletics. I think everybody involved in it probably believes that, and you just hate to see programs get nicked or the quality of programs be diminished. And I would echo the same thing about any academic program or any extracurricular activity. But the reality is that it's no different than public schools right now, a lot of tough decisions have to be made and I guess maybe I'm glad that I'm not on that -- part of that decision-making process, because that can't be a fun thing to go through, I know that.

Q. What effect does Adrian coming back have on this team?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a top-tier player, and he's coming back for the fifth year. So, you

know, it's -- I don't want to compare it to the Chuck Long story, probably our most celebrated fifth-year guy. But yeah, there's some similarities there. I mean, to have Chuck come back in his fifth year in '85 was important, and it's important for any football team, any team that -- whether it's a marquis player, which I think Adrian has kind of moved into that neighborhood, or any good team member, that's important. You like to keep guys in the program, and then that being said, you know, the reality is that players have choices to make.

I'm glad I don't coach basketball where they could do it after one year. I don't know how you -- I think it would make it a real challenge to build a team. But, you know, in our sport, players have the option. So, that's the way it goes. But we are thrilled he's back.

Q. Is there a conscious effort in the spring to prepare the guys mentally for the fact that next season you are likely to have more of a target on your back than years past?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. We have touched on that a little bit, but you know, we have had years where it was and years where it wasn't. I think last year a lot of people had expectations for us. Maybe they have amped it up a notch, I don't know.

But a couple of things on that; you know, so if you are doing well, that's going to happen, but again, it really doesn't mean much. And all we have to do, I won't go into all of the details. If you look back the last two years, we have had a decent record, go back the last 20 games, our record has been pretty good and if you look at the margin of error, the margin of points we have been beat by over the last two seasons, it's respectable. But then you flip it around, too, as close as it's been in our losses, you know, I could match every loss with a win.

You know, going back to our UNI game last year, first thing I thought of Saturday when the basketball game was over, I said, we could have been Kansas. That was my first thought. You know, I'll name three games real quick. The Indiana game, certainly, that could have been interesting. Took a heck of a drive for us to beat Michigan State. So it's not like we have just been rolling down the road. That's not how we are built and it's usually not how it's going to go.

You know, so far our margin of error is typically going to be pretty slim. Our players need



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to understand that. That's just how it is. You know, it's really kind of getting that way nationally with a couple exemptions, but teams that understand that the best tend to do it a little bit better and that's one of our big challenges. At the end of the day, just need to focus on what we are trying to do and realize that we can get beat by anybody.

Q. You mentioned UNI, your reaction to their game on Saturday and how are your brackets going?

COACH FERENTZ: I have one daughter -- two daughters, but one daughter picked that game, actually. She knows nothing about basketball. Her other picks were -- she was leading after the first two days. I guess she's still leading. She's beating the President, right now, on her brackets, whatever. Mine are awful.

Q. You talk about Adrian staying, in your opinion, was it time for Bryan and time for Amari to go?

COACH FERENTZ: Little bit I've been able to gather, I guess, talking to some guys Monday, especially, a lot of it is just how the market ends up playing out, if you will. I think right now it's working favorably for him. And to his credit, he's done a great job with this opportunity, which, you know, that's no big surprise. He really works hard and thinks right.

What I've told people is really what you're doing, in my mind, if they draft him, they are going to get a guy who really is going to be a senior here next year and it's really true. In his case, next year is his fourth year. He played as a true freshman, very unusual. Missed about half that season. Missed some time last year.

So developmentally, and I think this is a positive, his best football is clearly in front of him right now. He's played pretty good football. You know, if you look at how he played in the Bowl game after he was able to really have a good month of practice and training, he played exceptionally well, and that was a pretty good player. He didn't play against that guy the whole game and when they squared off, I thought he did a nice job. His best football is ahead of him. In my mind he's like a blue chip stock; it's hard to shoot a hole in him and there's a lot of upsides, so that's a thing.

Again that's a personal decision for players and I'm not going to start thinking that I know what's best for any of the guys. I have always

been a guy that believed in staying in school and finish out your career, but that's not my decision to make. That's being presumptuous and being selfish.

Q. Do you have a feel for how the scouts are looking at Pat Angerer and what they see for him?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think -- I know there are some teams that really like him. There are some teams that he doesn't fit with. He's probably not a 3-4 defensive scheme type of guy. They want bigger bodies.

I think going back even to September, August, when people came through right at the onset, Pat's film speaks well for him when you take, and when you take and consider his intangibles, might be as good as any player we have had come through here. Just what he added to our football team leadership-wise, spirit and all that kind of things. That's going to be a huge void for us. The on-field production we will miss but the rest of the package, as you guys know, it's entertaining but there's also a lot of substance there. I think the good football team recognize that stuff. Good organizations, they look for that stuff, as well as what he does on the field.

Q. Is there an area that really concerns you that you think, this needs to be ironed out?

COACH FERENTZ: We have a lot of things and it's on different levels. Clearly we know we all lose our starters, leadership void, that's another thing. Right along with that is how things are developing.

I'll go back last spring, last time was a really important time for Riley Reiff but then you have other guys that maybe are not going to be starters next year but they need to be moving along, too.

So it's one of those things that you've got to make sure guys are not thinking, okay, when Joe Smith graduates, that's when he's graduating in two years and that's when I'll really get ready to go. It's kind of the same thing, like in the basketball thing, we are playing a 13-seed here, so, yeah, we'll take care of that on Thursday and then, you know, Saturday, that's going to be a big game. So we have to get ready for that. So that kind of thinking gets you beat. Same thing with individuals. We just have to make sure our guys, they are going to be taken advantage of today.

That's the important thing.

Q. Do you worry about injuries in spring ball?

COACH FERENTZ: You always worry about that and you hold your breath every time you go out, but guys can get hurt walking across the street. I know the guy from West Virginia, he just got hurt, broke his foot in practice. And you guys saw the Michigan State guy go down.

I remember looking out the window in Baltimore visiting with the head coach and our starting center, just doing a very -- just a warm-up drill out on the field, practice field right out the window, I saw him go down like he got shot, Achilles, there, too. You learn. There's not much you can do about controlling it. We are going to practice smart, we try to do that, not put our guys at risk, but guys get hurt stretching, too. You have to be -- you can't get better sitting in these chairs, I know that. You can't practice football sitting in here. If we could, that's what we would do, but you can't do it.

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