

September 4, 2007



An Interview With:

## COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Two out of the three guys not available for interviews are academic All-Americans. I guess they're going to class, so that's a good thing.

To start out, I think we're in pretty decent shape for the ballgame, came out pretty injury-free Saturday, which was a positive. Paul Chaney still will not be available, don't see him playing this week, but I think he's getting closer. Dace Richardson worked on Sunday, and he should be back working full speed this week. So we'll see how he comes along here. But hopefully we'll get him back in the mix.

Just on a down note, Alex Kanellis looks like at this point he's going to end his career. He's had some problems with concussions and headaches, migraine headaches, and he's been through a gauntlet of people examining him and getting advice, that type of thing, and I think he is pretty much at ease with his decision, reached that decision with his family last week. We spoke about that.

Obviously we're sorry to see that happen. It's really, I think, the worst thing you deal with in football. Injuries are part of the game certainly. You hate to see anybody get hurt, and you certainly hate to see a player end his career prior to when was anticipated. So it's a tough situation, one we just feel badly about, feel badly for Alex. I know he had high expectations and was doing a great job.

And then on a positive note, though, he thinks he has an interest in staying with the program and helping out. It's certainly not mandatory, but I think he's enthused about that. We've had guys like Alex Wilcox, Vernon Jackson helping out on the field a little bit, and Alex Wilcox has done a great job both in strength and conditioning and coaching, so we're looking forward to having Alex join us and make some real positive contributions on that front.

Just real quickly, last week, again, I just want to express my appreciation to our fans first and foremost for turning out the way they did in Chicago. It was a great environment for us to play in. Certainly I think the whole trip went well. Even the traffic getting out of there wasn't too bad on Saturday.

But I think overall the team handled the trip pretty well. It was our first road game, and I thought they handled the logistics pretty well, kept their focus and did a good job during the game. Happy about that.

Now we moved on and have turned our attention towards Syracuse. First of all, it'll be good to play at home. I think one thing about this day and age, there are no set routine games anymore. The 11:00 o'clock kickoffs appeared to be for a while, but now it's 11:00 o'clock, 2:30, 3:30, 7:00 o'clock, whatever it may be, but we'll have to deal with that a little bit, but I don't think that'll be a big deal. It'll be a great environment, good to get back in Kinnick and start the season at home certainly.

And then we face a team that we expect a real tough contest from. All we have to do is look back to last year's game against Syracuse, and that's pretty much what we expect again. Tough ball club, they played extremely hard against us and gave us more than we wanted, and we were very fortunate to get out of there with a win. We had to play extremely well, particularly at the end, and I would expect the same thing this week.

We're going to have to do a good job against Syracuse, and then the other part of our attention has to be on ourselves. Probably the most important thing is that we show marked improvement this week, and that's really the process we'll begin today. So we have a lot of things we need to clean up, and that's kind of the challenge ahead of us, doing that, and then getting ready for an opponent.

**Q. You talked about the things you need to clean up. Last Saturday you ran the ball and you were able to stop the run. How promising is that for you as things progress?**

COACH FERENTZ: If we can continue that all season long it will help us, do that and not

turn the ball over and get some takeaways. Those four things right there, four statistics I guess you should say, takeaway, ball security and run, stop the run, those are pretty fundamental to winning, at least for the way we play. So that was a positive, and if we can continue along those lines it'll be great.

**Q. A lot of coaches say that the most improvement on a team comes after the first game and before the second game. Do you agree with that? And what type of things do you want to see improve this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: Typically it is. This is a week big for everybody in college football. You know, I look at us, too, I think this is a big month. We really need to make a lot of strides the next few weeks if we're going to have a chance to be a good football team.

As far as places to start, I think first thing that comes to my mind would be penalties. I think we had ten penalties and six of them were on special teams. It's kind of hard to be a good special teams unit if you get penalized, and that's an area where they tend to pop up a lot, illegal blocks, things of that nature. We've talked about that and had good film to look at. That's on the down side.

The plus side would be we thought our effort was pretty good on special teams overall and saw some things there that would tell us that we can become pretty solid if we can eliminate the loose ends.

First and foremost, I'd say the penalty reduction would be real paramount.

**Q. Did Jordan have anything to say afterwards? He just had so much adrenaline running through him.**

COACH FERENTZ: It was a little -- I hate to say you could see it coming, but you could see it coming. I guess the good news is he is fast because he got there way before the ball, and that's the good news. But the bad news is, yeah, I thought he stumbled, and the film showed it, but he stumbled a little bit, which took away from his ability maybe to pull off.

And probably the worst thing about the whole thing, it ruined him for the rest of the day. He was afraid to really cut it loose the rest of the way. He's going to be fine. He's got a good attitude and I thought he showed some good things. That was one of many first-time playing or first-game mistakes, and we had a handful of those. I think for the most part we responded from

them. But that one threw Jordan off a little bit the rest of the way.

**Q. After looking at the film, how about Christensen's playing the offensive line?**

COACH FERENTZ: Just kind of like what we thought with Jake, there are some throws probably he wishes he had made or some decisions he'd probably like to change. Certainly the drops didn't help his statistics, and that would have changed some things there.

We talked about penalties. I think we lost a 40-plus yard gain rush, which would have probably given us some points there, too. I can't remember if we scored or not. But anyway, it was a nice gain and a big play in the run game that came back on a hold.

But I think all in all, Jake's play was pretty good. I liked his demeanor out there. I think we all felt comfortable with that. I think he was aware of things and responded -- any adverse conditions, he responded favorably there.

And then the line I think for the most part did a good job. They played hard, made some errors, there are some things in there that have to get cleaned up and little things, but really nobody just -- like setting a guy free and letting him come through, which I kind of thought might happen, at least a time or two, and fortunately nobody got hurt out there, because you turn guys free, that can happen.

I think there are a lot of positives and a lot of things that we can build off of. I liked their effort overall.

**Q. Pretty good?**

COACH FERENTZ: For the most part it was pretty good. Pretty firm inside there and pretty good job on the edge. We got beat a time or two there. But for a first time out, I thought it was a good start and certainly one we can build off and a great teaching tape.

**Q. Do you take special pride in the line because a lot of it seems like you created a camp competition and then helped the other -- there was a real competition this year.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it really was. It was that way in the spring, too. As you know, we moved a lot of guys around, and we're still doing that. It's not over. Dace will be back in the mix here at some point, the next two weeks hopefully, and the other guys are improving. They only played two plays, that second group, but they did a good job when they were in there. They've been

doing some good things at practice. I think it's a close competition. We're not ready to ordain anyone as the next John Hannah or Robert Gallery or Eric Steinbach, but it's a good healthy group. I think they're working hard. We're hardly there yet, but there's some signs there that we can be okay up front.

**Q. What will happen when Richardson gets back?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I don't know. That's something we'll have to work through and just see what happens. First we've got to see him practice, in practice on a continual basis. He's missed 30 days, and those are big days. It's not like 30 days in the fall where really you're working hard two days a week. But camp every day -- not every day but most of them were pretty heavy.

He's got a lot of catching up to do to get in game shape and what have you and get his technique back. If it was just as easy as going out and practicing, playing after three practices, we would have showed up last week, the whole team would have showed up. Everybody would have been a lot fresher. All that being said, when he gets back, I know one thing, we've never had too many good players and too many good linemen, so hopefully we'll have that problem.

**Q. Have the drops been a problem with the receivers?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. A year ago, yeah. A year ago spring especially. But we've been catching the ball -- for the most part Saturday, the things that happened that were not what we had hoped, we kind of anticipated, I think. Outside of the drops, no, we've been catching the ball fairly well. I'm not going to name names, but one guy that probably hadn't been catching the ball real well consistently caught the ball real well on Saturday, which I'll take that first any day. I think any of us would.

But yeah, that was a little bit of a surprise, and probably concentration, probably jitters, I don't know, but hopefully we'll work through that.

**Q. At what point will you be forced to juggle the lineup because of drops?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, if we're doing it day after day after day or game after game, most importantly it's what you do in the games, but typically what you do in practice is what shows up in games, and this is an exception to the rule. But I think the rest of the stuff we saw Saturday, you could say, yeah, I kind of remember some days

where that happened. You know, we knew we were going to need some work there.

**Q. Could you talk a little bit about the scheduling?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, somebody said that on the phone deal a little while ago, and I really wasn't aware of it. My response was if you had taken a poll probably about eight years ago, you could have got pretty good odds on that one. You know, there's not much else to say. I'm just happy to be coaching anywhere right now. I'm really happy to be coaching here. Yeah, I'm just happy. And the fact that I'm here just means a lot of people have done a lot of good things over the last eight years, or else I wouldn't be here. I'd be somewhere else.

**Q. Do you like playing night games?**

COACH FERENTZ: They're okay. They were great in high school because that's what you did in high school. At least where I grew up that's what you did. They're unusual now, but I think they're going to become more a part of our life. So I think the more we do, the more use we get to it.

I think I made that comment earlier, it used to be -- certainly in the '80s you always played at 1:00 o'clock unless you had one of those CBS games -- am I allowed to say that? I probably shouldn't be saying that. We had a national game at 3:30 or whatever time those were, around 3:00 o'clock, 4:00 o'clock. But anyway, you'd have one of those; otherwise it was 1:00 o'clock and then 11:00 o'clock seemed unusual. And now it's a little bit of everything. The last couple years have been that way, and I think we're going to see more of that.

The environment is great. It's nice, and if it's hot it's even better because there's no sun out there, and if it's home it's even better because you have a short ride home. But when they're on the road, it makes for a long night with a short morning.

**Q. What do you remember from last year's night game atmosphere-wise?**

COACH FERENTZ: It was unbelievable. It was just absolutely unbelievable. It was great. There are a lot of great Kinnick moments, but that was one of them, at least that opening part. You know, there's something special about -- certainly when you play at our place, the electricity there is pretty good. So that's fun.

**Q. Did you learn anything from that**

**game against Ohio State that you maybe feel you could use as far as preparing differently for this night game against Syracuse?**

COACH FERENTZ: I thought we were ready to play last year. That wasn't an issue. Turning the ball over didn't help us. That was a huge issue for us.

But no, I thought we were ready to play. I thought we had good preparation all week and that day. I thought from kickoff our team was ready to play. I thought we played hard, just didn't play well enough, but we played hard. That's not one of those games I look back and say, ooh, boy, we stunk. I don't look at it that way. We didn't play well enough, but we played hard.

**Q. Have you paid attention at all to the media coverage of the Big Ten Network negotiations?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not really, no. I think there's stuff on my desk and I scan it and throw it out. With all due respect, I've got other things I'm a lot more worried about right now, like our team.

**Q. Regarding the fans, there's a lot of people pulling their hair out right now.**

COACH FERENTZ: I empathize with our fans first and foremost, and I think all of us -- we want every game, be it football, basketball, any sport to be accessible to our fans. If they can't make it here to see a game live, then we want them to be able to see it on TV. I think we'll get there, but I'm no expert in this field and don't pretend to be. I think that's a big driving force behind the Big Ten Network is more exposure in sports and also more exposure for the University. I think those are the pluses.

I'm no business expert, but it seems like any time you do a new venture it's always going to be a little bumpy at the front end. I've got a lot of respect for Jim Delany. I think he's a pretty sharp guy. I can't imagine we'd be going down this road if he didn't have good reason to think it was going to be successful. I certainly have no reason to think it's not going to be a good thing. But we're going to go through some bumps, I know that, and I hope they're not too many.

**Q. A lot of these players were taken off the depth chart this week, freshmen on the defense, secondary, other positions.**

COACH FERENTZ: Just to clean it up, there's no significance here. Things haven't changed an awful lot. With our thinking, we played four freshmen playing Saturday and we still have 12 in the picture, maybe three or four of those on

the back burner, but we'll keep the team alive and just see what happens. You can't predict the future as far as injuries or how guys develop or don't develop and that type of thing, so no major changes there.

**Q. You didn't play any backup quarterbacks Saturday. Is that an area that you'd like to get some experience in?**

COACH FERENTZ: In a perfect world, yeah, you'd love to have that opportunity. But I don't think any of us were feeling too sure about anything really until the end there. We ran the second line in a couple snaps left, but it was one of those days where we thought it would be a four-quarter ballgame and it was.

It's probably better that way anyway because we really had to earn it. We had to work hard and plays were critical out there, so it was good for our younger guys especially to be involved in that kind of situation and have to deal with that because we're going to have a lot of those this year. I think we expect those week in and week out.

**Q. That was kind of a question mark going into the game. How did Harold and the secondary do?**

COACH FERENTZ: I thought they did a pretty good job overall. Harold had to come out for a little bit, but I thought all three guys that played played well and did some good things, and I thought the younger guys, Greenwood and Tillison, both did a good job on special teams, which was good, too. We were really hoping -- it's the first time either one of those guys had played, so we were hoping to mature them a little bit on the special teams end of it all.

**Q. The clock is running on Brian Bulaga. Do you see a similar break-in period like with Dace and Gates years ago?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, I guess I've got to think back on that. You mean rotate?

**Q. Yeah.**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how it goes, yeah, we'll rotate those guys. We'll see how it goes. He's playing a little bit of guard, a little bit of tackle. He had an injury that kept him out for about a week, but he's made good progress and we definitely think he's in the thick of it. Chances are we're going to need more than five guys, that's for sure, during the fall.

**Q. Back to Alex, how long was he dealing with those headaches? And the decision, was that something recommended to him by doctors, or is that something where he realized that he just wasn't able to --**

COACH FERENTZ: It's been ongoing. He had a concussion in the spring and had an episode early in camp. He's seen a lot of different specialists, and as you know, this is a kind of a new area, if you will, the study of this injury. So yeah, he's spoken to several different doctors in different fields, and they all -- at the end of the day, we sat down -- I say we did, the medical staff, sat down with Alex and his folks, and everybody had their input, and that was the conclusion they came up with. It's just the best thing to do at this point right now is him to pull out.

It's not like a broken arm or something like that where you -- or a broken finger that you can live with. You don't want to do any damage obviously to your mind. I think it's a decision we totally support, and I just don't think you mess around there. I think it's true with any player, you always think about what's best for their long-term health, but again, you're talking about a head area, that's a whole different deal.

But even with joints, I mean, who wants to be crippled when they're 50 if they don't have to be, so that's always something to think about. You could end up with a limb replacement or joint replacement.

**Q. In the spring and the fall several guys talked about the need to bring fire and intensity back to this team. Do you feel like you're seeing that so far?**

COACH FERENTZ: I thought we played hard. I thought our older guys, our most experienced guys, we were hoping they would give us great leadership out there and play like the experienced guys, and they did that. I made the comment earlier, this has been a fun group to be around. Really since January they've worked hard in every phase, they've done a good job. But the proof is in the pudding, and this is where the rubber hits the road right now in the fall, so we've got one down, 11 to go, and we'll see how well we run the race. So far, one for one, that's a good start.

**Q. Did you see any of Syracuse's game on Friday night?**

COACH FERENTZ: Just a little bit. It's hard to -- we had meetings going on. I have a hard time cross-scouting. I'm not a good multitask guy. I've said that before. I can't scout people in

the shower and stuff like that, what have you. I watched it a little bit, but it was hard to pay attention.

The one thing that jumped out, it looked like they were emotionally ready to go. It looked like they were fired up and ready to go. I saw a little bit of the start.

**Q. They gave up 300 yards rushing. Is that something you guys --**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've seen the film. Washington's quarterback is a pretty impressive guy, 6'4", he's a big guy that can run. He's one of those guys.

It's hard for us to really -- there's not a lot we get out of that whole thing. That running back played pretty well, too. But we're kind of dissimilar as far as the way we're built. It's not a great film for us that way.

**Q. The quarterback did complete passes to ten different receivers, though. Did that worry you, the way he was able to make short passes this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think people are going to try to throw the ball against us, we know that, and that's going to happen all year long. As long as we're not giving up the big ones, we'll survive. We'll give up the short stuff. But if they start throwing over our heads, which Northern Illinois hit one on us, that's not a good thing. The big plays are the things we want to try to be able to control.

**Q. I'll try to keep a straight face when I ask this. Is there any difference between catching a ball thrown by a left-handed quarterback and a right-handed quarterback?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. Somebody brought that up Saturday. If that was the problem, you'd think it would have shown up like a year ago when Jake got here. We've been catching the ball well in practice, and I just think it was a concentration thing probably. We just have to do a little bit better job.

**Q. You're left-handed, right?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I can't throw too well, though. I can't throw a football.

**Q. Captains for this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm sorry, yeah. I left that out. Our captains this week are our two running backs Albert Young, Damian Sims; Mike Klinkenborg defensively; and then Charles

Godfrey, defense/special teams, did a great job on both areas.

**Q. In terms of preparation, do you think that it's vital that you played the game last year so your players have kind of recollection of what happened when you played the team rather than just look strictly at the game film and the stats?**

COACH FERENTZ: It helps, I think. Any time you have some familiarity with an opponent, that's a good thing. It helped us with Northern Illinois, and Syracuse is the same way, and then we'll have to go down a different path when we play Michigan State and Penn State. We haven't seen those guys in a couple years. I think you lose your feel, if you will, for it.

I think the one thing we need to be cognizant of is that we had a very tough game with these guys last year, and that was the comment -- an observation I made last year when we played them because their record wasn't particularly great two years ago, but they played tough against some good people. I think it was Notre Dame, I think Louisville, and just got done looking at the Louisville game this morning from last year, and they played Louisville tough last year. So we have to expect a tough ballgame. We're probably going to be up for about 12 of those. That's our mindset. We need to be ready to go.

**Q. Perception, the kids just look at 42-12, the stats that were there, and then last year was a double overtime game, what they did to us last year versus the other day?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a fine line. We saw that this past Saturday around the country. These guys played Wake Forest off their feet a year ago, the week before we played them. At that time, okay, so what, Wake Forest, big deal, but Wake Forest ends up in the Orange Bowl. You never know in September really what's what and who's who. We found out at the end of the day.

I guess I would offer this up, Syracuse played the heck out of them, they played the heck out of us. They weren't that far away last year from getting over the hump, and my guess is that's their goal right now. There's no better way than to come in here and beat us.

We need to be ready to battle here. This is going to be a tough ballgame. We need to have that mindset. Hopefully we learned that last year. That's just going to be the nature of our team. We'll be in for good games every weekend.

**Q. Do you anticipate a change in the league with Boise State's win over Oklahoma, Youngstown State's win against Michigan, there are a lot of football players out there now that could be overlooked?**

COACH FERENTZ: There really are. The 85 scholarship limit I think has changed the geography. There are certain teams that are still loaded, and it's always going to be that way. But I think that number is probably under ten right now. Everybody else has an opportunity.

To me, the bottom line, just what I said, our team needs to realize that. It's a good thing, but it's a bad thing if you don't take it in the right way, and you need to realize anybody is capable of doing good things on Saturday. The best thing you can do is play your best and try to eliminate any problems. We didn't always do that last year.

**Q. Can a position can be won or lost in practice this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, it could be. If one of the contestants just flat-out shanked every ball. But we're going to work our way through it. I think that's the approach we're going to take. You know, you can do two things; you can have a big meeting and just dissect it and analyze it and do all that stuff and waste a lot of time or go out and work on it, and that's our plan. We're just going to go out and work on it and see if we can't get better and hopefully we'll be better this Saturday and better the next Saturday after that and keep pushing for it.

**Q. Do you remember that goal line stand last year at the end of the Syracuse game?**

COACH FERENTZ: It was long, like the longest ever. I've never seen anything or experienced anything like that, and I doubt I ever will again. I think most of us can say that. It was a totally unusual situation. Both teams were competing extremely hard at that point, and I think you've got to give our defense an awful lot of credit. To hold up like that was phenomenal. The last couple plays, just outstanding.

The snapshot moment there was Mike coming over and everybody else doing their jobs and Klink coming in and cleaning the thing up. It was a great play. Your mind runs a gamut of thoughts during that whole situation.

**Q. (Inaudible) this year in the match-up?**

COACH FERENTZ: I hope so, but I hope

also it serves as a reminder how it was tough to get out of that with a victory. We had to fight and scrap for what we got that day, and it was just a tough ballgame. We need to be ready for that kind of game again.

**Q. What you talked about with turnovers, maybe it was four or five that game --**

COACH FERENTZ: We had a few of them.

**Q. Is that pretty much what you're talking about this year?**

COACH FERENTZ: In my mind if you look at statistics, the last eight years here, you know, and it's pretty much true, but it is true for us, if we do a good job with turnovers, takeaways and turnovers, it's a two-headed dragon there, the odds of us having a good team go up with us having success on the field.

Some teams, I don't want to mention it, but there was a champion in our conference recently that didn't do a great job with turnovers, but they still won the league. If you've got that much talent and that much going for you, sometimes you can be sloppy. But for us typically, and I'll go back to 2002, I think we were plus 15 or 13. And Ohio State was kind of -- they won the championship that year.

The way we'd have to win one if we ever won one where you just do everything right each week, and they were right there with us or equal to us. In close ball games, things like that, which we're apt to be in close games, that's a big factor, ball security and takeaways are big.

**Q. There was a part Saturday in the game where Northern Illinois started on your 40-yard line in comparison to 2004. Do you see any similarities between the defensive line this year and back in 2004?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, just trying to think about that Wisconsin game where we started in the hole two times in row. It wasn't near as bad as Saturday. We were way in the hole in that game. They came out with three.

That's the nice thing about having defensive play; it gives you a chance to overcome some mistakes, turnovers or in the kicking game, that type of thing.

But all that being said, we'd rather have the other team have to go 80 and see what they can do. But as far as comparisons, it's way too early. But we have some veterans at least. We're

veteran up front like we were that year, and hopefully that can be a good formula for us.

## **FastScripts by ASAP Sports....**