

**October 15, 2011**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Certainly we're thrilled to get the victory tonight, and we knew it wouldn't come easy, and it certainly didn't. Northwestern is a very well-coached team and they compete extremely hard. So we had to work for everything we got certainly, but it was an excellent football game, and again, we're just thrilled to get the victory.

**Q. How personally did these guys, especially the seniors, take it, five out of six the way Persa has played against you?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know, we talked so much about the five out of six part or whatever it may be. First of all, we needed to win today. We just needed to win. We were more focused on that than anything else.

But you can't look at Northwestern and not be focused on their quarterback. Dan Persa is an outstanding competitor, tremendous quarterback, and they're very creative and efficient with what they do. Anytime you go up against him, it's going to be a tough night's work, and it certainly was tonight.

**Q. You got 41 tonight. What's the difference there? What's changed?**

COACH FERENTZ: Defense helped us out on seven of those, and that's really important, not that you count on a defensive score every game. But it's a little bit like the Bowl game; we played a tremendous quarterback down in Arizona and he made a mistake and we made them pay for that. Certainly in this case it was a huge play in the game, too. They were taking it down and moving the ball pretty readily at that point. Really good there.

Just a lot of ups and downs in the game like this, a lot of swings back and forth. You play a team like that, it's going to happen. But I thought our guys met the challenge.

A lot of things to clean up and improve on, but we played hard tonight and competed hard, and that's where everything starts.

**Q. Your guys were really putting a hurry on Persa.**

COACH FERENTZ: It's easier said than done. We talk about containing and pressuring, too, against him because he's so elusive. There was a play against Illinois -- I talked to you the other day about the one against Michigan. There was one in Illinois where he did the 360, just unbelievable. So it's easier said than done.

But I really thought our guys worked hard up front. I thought they were really digging hard in there and forcing some pressure. Pretty good for the most part with contained, which is, again, a tougher task than it looks from the sideline, that's for sure. And did it a little bit short-handed; Tom Nardo out; LeBron came out of the game. Really proud of the way guys -- Steve Bigach jumping in there, certainly Dominic Alvis did a lot of good things out there. We had a lot of guys jump in and help out, and it was good to see.

**Q. What did you think of Marcus today? It seemed like this was the guy we kind of expected, just running over people as the game wore on?**

COACH FERENTZ: Exactly. It looked like Marcus Coker out there, and that's what we're hopefully working towards. He was a lot more decisive today. He didn't overanalyze things, which he'll tend to do. He's a deep thinker, and maybe that carries over to his running game a little bit. But I thought tonight he was decisive and played to his strengths, which is what good football players do, so it was really good to see him. That

picked our team up a little bit.

**Q. There was good protection for Vandenberg, too, especially on long throws.**

COACH FERENTZ: The guys did a good job up front, and we did a better job against the dogs. They brought some pressure with their linebackers, which we expected that. We met that challenge a little bit better. We've still got things we can get better at. I'm proud of James. He had that pick one but came back and didn't let that bog him down, and really did a good job leading us in that second half, came up with some really pretty drives, good drives where we kept the defense off the field for a little bit, and that was really important. Also answered, responded to some -- to their success offensively, there were a lot of positives out there.

**Q. I apologize if you've been asked this, but do you feel like Alvis is doing everything you want him to do?**

COACH FERENTZ: He did a great job, and as you saw, he shifted over to the Mike backer position when James couldn't go. He had some really nice hits out there today, as good as I've seen him have maybe career-wise. So he was certainly into the game. He did a good job at the leadership position. Tom has been one of our team leaders, not just defensive leaders anyway, but did a good job at that Mike position, and a lot of checks and adjustments against a team like this. He's just a heck of a football player, and good to see him do what he did tonight.

**Q. You've had a lot of great receivers come through this school over the years. Marvin McNutt's big touchdown gives him the all-time record. What makes him special?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's a credit to Marvin. He unselfishly changed positions, and it was all about getting on the field. He wanted to get on the field. It's been a process for him. He had to learn how to play that position. You don't just go out there and play it, although their No. 2 does a pretty good job of that. But he's really worked hard to learn the ins and outs of it and has just worked hard throughout his entire career. He's got good size, good speed and has made some really big plays and made a couple big ones tonight on the onside kick recoveries, and those were as big a plays as there were in the game. Our execution was good there. That was good to see.

**Q. When they tied the game at 17, 11-play drive, nine rushes. Do you feel it was essential that you went back to basics?**

COACH FERENTZ: I just talked to the guys on the radio and they said Northwestern had 92 plays, which is believable. Felt like it. We lost a possession there in the first half. Nobody is complaining, but when Miller picked it off and took it back for seven, the defense is right back on the field. So that's a tough workout. It was really critical, and we certainly did not want to start the third quarter that way. We gave up a couple possessions there.

But it was good. I ought overall the team responded in all areas pretty well. As the game went on, that was certainly a big drive.

**Q. Donatell was also all over it tonight, too?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's our next man in. We've had a few of those. Alvis really played a big role, big act, and Tommy jumped in there and took Tyler's spot when Tyler moved inside, and he's been doing a good job on special teams. He is a fourth year guy now, and we're thin at linebacker. Hitchens is still not full speed. Hopefully we'll be closer to full speed next week, but anybody that's eligible right now is playing, and Tommy did a good job.

**Q. The defense didn't buckle. You lost James, I imagine that's a pretty big blow, and then Nardo?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Nardo got the kiss of death; he made Big Ten Player of the Week and, boom, sprains his ankle after 23, 24 plays last week. But that's football. Everybody has got issues, everybody has got problems. We just don't know the other teams as well as we know ours.

But I thought all of our guys had a good attitude that way. And nobody is sitting around getting ready to make excuses, they're just trying to play and get the job done. It's going to be that way all season. We'll have other injuries come up or other things happen, so guys have to step in and play, and just really proud of the effort tonight.

**Q. On both of your pick sixes this year, Micah Hyde ended up with blocks 30 yards down the field from where the catch was made. What does that say about him as a heady player?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think it says two things, and I'll toot our coaches' horns on that one. Traditionally we've done a really good job, be it a blocked kick, Penn State '02, a blocked kick that ended up being a huge swing, we got a two-pointer and they didn't get their one, obviously a big play in the game. And in that play in particular, Bob Sanders was on the field if you're looking from the kicking team, Bob Sanders is on that left wing and ends up making a big block down on the other side of the field, so he hustled down there for DJ Johnson.

Micah's return last year in the Bowl -- all these returns you see pretty good blocking, so that's a credit to our guys, they're unselfish, and they understand the importance of taking a pick or a turnover and making an offensive play. There's an opportunity there, and we've done a pretty good job, but our coaches do a good job of coaching that, and then most importantly like anything else, what the players do with the opportunity is what counts, and they've really done a good job. Micah had a beautiful block on that play, just gorgeous.

**Q. What did you think about hearing about Brett Greenwood coming out of the coma? I think the nurse called it a miracle.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, I am just going to let the Greenwoods handle that, but I'm just really happy things are moving forward. I will say that. I think it's fair to say that certainly, and we're all very, very enthused about that. The only other thing I'd say is I wouldn't rule -- we certainly learned don't ever rule Brett Greenwood out. You talk about a guy with great determination, great desire, great will; the guy just did everything right all the time. He's got a little spunk to him, I can promise you that, and that takes go from being a walk-on to a four-year starter. He was part of a lot of big wins around here.

We're all pulling for him, obviously, and just he's a great young man from a great family.

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