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An Interview With:

KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Just a couple things. We'll kind of wrap up the spring here a little bit and hit a few things.

First of all, the guys voted on the leadership group at the end of last week. That will come out today. Steve will have a release on that. As always, I think it's a good representation, a good group of guys. The five seniors are Steve Bigach, Greg Castillo, James Ferentz, Micah Hyde, James Vandenberg. Really no big surprises there certainly.

Four juniors with Casey Kreiter, James Morris, Brad Rogers, and Brett Van Sloten. Two guys out of the sophomore class, Kevonte Martin-Manley and Brandon Scherff. And then the first year class, we've got three guys actually, Quinton Alston, Austin Blythe, and Jake Rudock. I think it's a good group, and they'll do a good job. I'll actually meet with those guys this week, and we'll talk about a few things. Happy about that part of it.

Medically right now, just to give you an update on that. We had a couple of guys that were injured since last time I met with you. Casey McMillan had a knee injury. John Chelf has had a knee injury. Both of those guys required surgery. John had his, I believe, two weeks ago. Casey is actually scheduled to have a repair today. And the good news is that both those guys should be ready to go, I would think, in July at some point. That's the good news.

On the other hand, with Jordan Canzeri, he's still working hard. Everything is going fine, but that's touch and go, to say the least.

The other development medically, unfortunately, is Shane DiBona. He came off that Achilles. He was injured early in spring, and he's not going to be able to come back. He's going to

take a medical, and he'll stay in school and finish his degree, work here, but will not play football anymore. We're certainly sorry to make that announcement.

The other guys are all moving back in a good way. Dom Alvis and Carl Davis, most notably, didn't practice this spring, but they're on good pace to be getting back. Right now we expect them to be ready to go the first week of June when we begin the summer program. That's good news certainly.

Regarding the football team, I think we made good progress. We had three workouts after the open scrimmage. The open scrimmage wasn't much to look at, and that's kind of typical of spring practice overall. I think Saturday's work was better. I think both the two practices midweek were good practices also.

We continue to make progress, but spring ball never looks too pretty, that's for sure. It's kind of where we're at right now. The attitude of the team is good. It's been good since we got going in January. I think they're young, and they know we have work to do.

And the other thing is we've seen some guys emerge a little bit and make some moves, guys that maybe we didn't have ranked real high internally going into spring ball but they have certainly shown some progress. You think back to every December it seems like we see a couple of guys make a move. I think we've seen that in this period here too. So that's a good thing.

We still have a lot of room for improvement, and typical of any football team, but I think this team especially with our youth and experience, we're going to see a lot of transition and a lot of things happening here between now and September. That's going to be fun to track, fun to watch. It's really in the players' hands how they want to approach it and how much they want to improve.

That's kind of where we're at at the end of

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spring. And the last thing obviously is the draft coming up this weekend. Shifting gears here a little bit, different set of players, it's an exciting time for all the guys that finished up back in December, and an anxious time certainly, and we wish all of them well. I think we had seven guys at the combine back in February. Which puts us at 23 over the last three years, which is a pretty high number. I think that leads the Big Ten and puts us about six ahead of everybody else in the league.

The guys that end up being seniors here and are draft eligible certainly have done a good job of developing. A lot of the credit there goes to the support staff that we have. Our coaching staff does a good job, I think, coaching our players. Chris Doyle and the strength staff do a wonderful job, and then most importantly, I think all those players certainly have worked hard, and they've shown a lot of determination to get to that point.

So they've all invested. They've worked hard, and this is an exciting time for them. We certainly wish them luck Thursday, Friday, and Saturday as they try to launch into the next phase of their careers.

I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. Where does Reiff sit in the draft? A top 10 guy, top 15 guy?

COACH FERENTZ: You guys probably know as much as I do. At least everything I read sounds like he's got the shot to be the top 15 guy. It's really hard to predict, but the good news is it looks like it's not the deepest pool maybe of offensive tackles. So maybe a team or two will get antsy. But he's going to be a really good football player.

Q. What do the pros like about him?

COACH FERENTZ: The first thing that comes to my mind is just his aggressiveness. He's durable. It's hard to get Riley off the field. The other thing is he's just a very aggressive player. And I feel a little bit like I did about Bryan Bulaga with Riley. Clearly, his best football is ahead of him.

I could say the same thing about Marshal Yanda. Marshal was here for two years. Riley could have come back for another year. I fully understand why he chose to go out. Looks like a real smart decision at this point. The real plus is whoever gets him is going to see better football from him with each month in the future.

Q. Saw where Marvin is maybe fourth, fifth round. Does that surprise you? What do you think of that situation?

COACH FERENTZ: Marvin had a fantastic career with us. Nobody's been more productive and made more big plays, but a lot of the draft is just based on who's available, what's out there, and receivers are usual but different. Linemen tend to be at a real premium, be it offensive and defensive linemen.

The bottom line is the one thing I tell all those guys, it really doesn't matter how you get to where you get. There are financial ramifications, obviously, but the most important thing is what they do when they get there and if they take advantage of that opportunity. They're all going to make more in their second contract if they're good enough to get there. So that's the biggest thing, just get there and work hard.

I think he's got his best football ahead of him too. That's kind of the same discussion really. He's kind of, not an infant at that position, but he still has room for development.

Q. You mentioned some guys who have kind of emerged. Who are some of those guys that maybe surprised you this spring?

COACH FERENTZ: A couple things, I guess. We went in concerned about the defensive line. I think those guys made progress. I doubt anybody made more progress than Louis Trinca-Pasat. He was kind of on the ropes back in December, quite frankly. A young guy who really was starting to question where his heart was and how important it was to him, and it showed up in his performance. He was out there, he looked okay, but nothing to write home about.

In the spring, he's really just quietly emerged, and by the second half of spring ball, he's playing as well as anybody on the field either side of the ball. So he's clearly taken some steps.

Steve Bigach played well. Joe Gaglione, who's barely played, he had a good spring, certainly a starting point. Darian Cooper was up and down a bit, as was Riley McMinn, but you expect that from young guys. I think they'll be a little better in August. Bud Spears was kind of a flat line guy in December, and I think he showed some signs. I think that group, as a whole, kind of took steps forward. Mike Hardy did some good things.

Another group was the tight ends. We had

the two freshmen tight ends we redshirted a year ago. Jake Duzey kind of showed up a bit at the end of bowl prep down in Arizona when Ray was out. We had to move him up, and he was getting some work with us. Both he and Henry Krieger-Coble did a nice job this spring. That's a starting point at least with some guys.

Q. I know that these guys have to be tough and they have to stick with it, but what is the strategy with bringing in the project defensive linemen? You've got several of those. I think you picked up a few this week even for 2013. How do you keep them -- what is the strategy? Because they probably get pushed around -- I mean, Carl told his story about getting picked up with Gary. How do you keep them engaged? How do you keep them into it?

COACH FERENTZ: You've got to get the right guys. That's really what it comes down to. It's a little bit like the draft. I think my sister could watch Adrian Clayborn on the tape and say, it would be good to get one of those guys on your team, if she were a pro scout, which she's not. She's a pretty good school teacher.

Anyway, for us, it's like drafting the third, fourth, fifth rounds. Who really projects, has upside, that type of thing? Quite often, that's how our recruiting goes at that position. It's just a hard position to recruit to. And the obvious prospects tend to disappear pretty quickly. There are things we look for, and height isn't one of them. We don't worry about that. We don't worry so much about body weight of a high school player. We've got examples of that.

Like anything, you learn from your past, and our players teach us an awful lot if we pay attention to what we've had success with, and maybe conversely, guys that haven't worked out as well. That's kind of what we try to use as a barometer and a guide.

Q. What do you look for? I mean, is there explosion, tape, what --

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's hard to play defense if you can't move, I know that. And it's really hard to play offense if you can't too. Depending on what you do and what our guys do, you're going to have to be able to move a little bit. They've got to be tough, and they've got to be fairly smart. I think that's some commonalities there. If a guy's got pride, then we'll work hard enough.

The work part, we can give him that, but we can't -- there's certain things we can't teach. That's just kind of the way it goes. Again, we're not too worried about height. Bob Sanders is the poster child of that one. He started that off. I'll go back to when I was here in the '80s. I learned Mark Sindlinger, we had to talk his dad Mike into the fact we actually did believe he was good enough to play here. He was 6 foot and maybe a little bit more than that. He might contest that, but just a little over 6 foot, and had to gain weight to be a super heavyweight back in those days. They had a super heavyweight category.

He came in and played as a true freshman behind Joe Hill again Berg, and played on three really great football teams and played great football and was a leader for us. You learn lessons in your career, and that was certainly one of them.

Q. Last year at this time, you only had one commitment, now you've got six. I know you can't talk about them specifically, but are you doing anything differently?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. I think it's just a sign of the times. A couple of years back, it really became common place for prospects to be out -- visiting places in June and July, to some extent. But June -- and I think all we've seen now, and this is kind of national -- it's translating into March and April now. I think that's just how the recruiting is going. It's driven by social media, and it's become a real industry.

A lot of people are doing it for a business, and I think it's really heightened awareness. It's not going to slow down for sure. I think our roles at some point may end up changing and evolving a little bit. I've heard the NCAA said they're going to look at the whole rule book a little bit. I think this kind of falls in that category in some regards just because the face of recruiting's changed so dramatically. It's really changing. I think it's just a reflection of that. We're not doing anything differently other than hosting more prospects than we used to.

Spring football, we always hit a couple of balls in the air, but that's just the wave of the future.

Q. You would be in favor of early recruiting for football?

COACH FERENTZ: We have been. I

don't know if it would affect us. I was thinking more so early December or mid-December. So prospects would be -- wouldn't have to be harassed through the holidays and all that during that period although they've got the call limitations. It would be nice for prospects to sign at some early date and not have to worry about people knocking on their door in December and January.

Q. How about just signing on the day they come in?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a slippery slope there. Yeah, that's a good one. That's one thing that brings up a good point. One thing we do hope, when people commit, we just hope -- we encourage them to make a commitment only if they really mean it. It's going to be your final decision. It's up to the prospect parents, guardians, that type of thing.

But there probably needs to be a uniform time. I don't know when that is, but we'll see what happens.

Q. If they want to look at schools, how do you feel?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure that means commit. Our definition of commit is they want to come here. If they want to look at other schools, that's fine, but just don't commit. We're not going to accept a commitment if they still want to date.

Q. Do you speed up -- with the change in the timeline, do you speed up how early you offer a kid maybe as opposed to how you have in the past?

COACH FERENTZ: Not necessarily. I think the one -- everything's changed in our way of thinking a little bit, to some extent, with one exception, and that's we just really encourage our guys let's not offer unless we're sure. But it's hard to be sure. You offer up a tape, you talk to people on the phone, coaches, people in the school, and you think you know, you hope you know, but it's not the same as getting to know.

So we, like most people, have offered without really meeting a player, a prospect face to face, and that's a little bit scary. It's a little bit like mail order recruiting. That's the phrase I use with our staff, and that's scary. If you guys ever bought anything from a mail order or online, the box gets there, and you open it up, and it's like, oh, I'm not

sure -- you can return that stuff. This is not quite the same. So it's a little scary.

There's not a lot of logic in this whole process, quite frankly.

Q. So you get a recruit, they come for a year, they've seen you play for years. They don't like your style. They transfer. They get their paper. What's the most number of schools that you put on a banned list?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure we've really had many of those. I can think of one in the last five years where we did put some limitations on the prospect's ability to go somewhere. I think otherwise -- my feeling, you hope it never comes to that. Because I think, again, it goes back to the point don't commit or don't do it unless you're sure. But all that being said, things don't always work out perfectly, and I get that.

My attitude too, if you don't want to be here, it's probably best you do leave and go somewhere else. It would probably be better for everybody. So as long as the player tries to work through whatever difficulties they're experiencing because every player does, everybody does when they start something new. But after that, have at it. Again, I can only think of one place where I think maybe we limited a player, a prospect, where it just didn't seem like it would be good.

Q. Limited a prospect or a different school?

COACH FERENTZ: A different school.

Q. Not someplace in the Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: They're going to lose their scholarship, but they could do that, I think. Did we change that rule? I've got to tell you, I'm confused. I read something last week that confused heck out of me? Did you guys read that too?

Q. Yeah. You have to sit out a year and pay your own way for a year, and then you can go on scholarship.

COACH FERENTZ: Did I miss that one? I just read it and didn't understand it.

Q. Is that the issue about transferring within conference?

COACH FERENTZ: I like our policy of not -- at least what I thought was you couldn't get a

scholarship. I think that's good because for obviously reasons. It could really get a little sticky there. Yeah, that's a little sticky. I think that's a good policy. Sounds like it's starting to get whacked away at. In fact, I think there was an exception to that somewhere in recent history in another sport, going back a year or two.

Q. Would you consider -- and pardon me if you've already had one -- a guy who could just come in for one year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think I'd consider anything if we thought it would work. If it fit in and not disrupted the chemistry of our football team. In fact, if you know of any running backs right now. I think somebody asked me that already. I think it's just you have to know your team and hopefully know the player that's coming in. Seems like it worked pretty well for Wisconsin last year. It worked out pretty well.

Q. Is that a good thing, though, for college football or college athletics?

COACH FERENTZ: To that point, I'm not in favor of that rule. That's just me personally. I think it opens up a whole can of worms, but I guess if a guy can graduate, it's to his credit. Tyler Nielsen could have gone somewhere last year. I'm glad he didn't. That would be a little disturbing. It just would be.

Q. He could have?

COACH FERENTZ: He could have. Tyler had a business degree last May.

Q. Was he recruited?

COACH FERENTZ: Not that I'm aware of. Maybe I should have been recruiting him. I was trying to be nice to him that month.

Q. What is your level of communication right now with Barkley Hill and Greg Garmon. Are they going to be important players when they walk in?

COACH FERENTZ: They're on my list. Barkley was down here, Greg was not. Our coaches will see them. They'll be down at the schools in the next month. I will talk to both those guys in the next two weeks probably. I'm on that club circuit already. I've got three in the bag right now, and I've made that comment. I think we have to have the approach that both those guys, if they

can help us, will, just because of our numbers right now.

I am pleased with the progress that Bullock and Johnson made during spring. I think they improved pretty much each and every day and feel a lot better about what they're doing now and where they're at. But we're going to need more than two guys certainly. So if those two guys can help us, that would be a great thing. We have other positions as well. We don't have our punting position settled by any stretch, defense and receiver, I think anywhere on defense and receiver too. Possibilities.

Q. How do you feel about the fact that your one night game is going to be a home game this year? Is that a big plus?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm all for night games at home. I'm all against them on the road, especially in the western time zones. Night games in Kinnick, that's tough to beat that. I joke about the only bad thing about playing on the road is coming home. It just makes for a long night or an early morning, but night games are pretty neat.

When I was in high school, we played at night, and it's kind of a special feeling. You go back to the atmosphere we were involved in at Penn State a couple of years ago. If you like college football, that's a great thing to be involved in. But all that being said, I'd rather be in Kinnick.

Q. Did you accomplish everything you hoped to offensively with the changes in spring?

COACH FERENTZ: We're off and running. We're not there yet by any stretch. One of the positives, we're not a great team by any stretch, but I think one of the positives -- this is true in all phases, but especially the offense. The guys really learned better than I would have thought. I think there are some thing the last couple weeks where we stalled out, or some guys stalled out on some stuff.

I think for the most part they really did a good job. He was really impressed. We kind of went through that a little bit when we moved to Baltimore. Our offense was much different there, terminology-wise. The players grabbed it a lot quicker than the coaches, quite frankly. It was interesting, but I think that's what we witnessed here.

Q. Greg and Phil are both going to be upstairs, they said that. Do you rehearse that at some point?

COACH FERENTZ: We did Saturday, this past Saturday. We did a little work, and it went pretty smoothly, seamlessly. And we'll come back in August and do the same thing and just make sure we got everything the way we want it. Probably do it a couple times, I think, in August. But right now it seems to be good.

Q. Between recruiting and the other stuff, do you guys offensively go back and readjust what you want to do or maybe tried to install in spring, or do you have an idea now of what the players can handle and go back to that statement of doing what the players can do. Has that adjusted? Do you adjust that?

COACH FERENTZ: I think for sure. I think right now the first and most important thing you do every spring is assess your team, where they're at currently. So 15 days gave us a good chance to do that. And also you try to project a little bit in terms of what might be able to help us in terms of players coming in and then also what other developments potentially could take place.

All that being said, sometimes players surprise you in a good way. Sometimes they surprise you in a way that's not as good. I think we felt like there was potential at the tight end position going into it, and I think right now we feel good about that position for sure.

I alluded to the two guys we redshirted. I think they're both ready to actually be out on the field and play. I think both of them were well ahead of where (Allan) Reisner was, who was a true freshman, and we threw him out there out of necessity. I think we have a chance there. The running back thing, I like the quality of the two guys that got all the work, but we've got a lot of room for more help there. So that's going to be a big thing.

And the receiver position, I think Don Shumpert made some strides. Kevonte, when he was fully healthy, looked really good. Keenan, he was up and down. He was injured a little bit and up and down all spring. We have some room there for guys to step up. Steve Staggs was hurt a little bit. I don't know that we have a handle on that one right now. It's going to be a big area for us to concentrate on recruiting as well.

Q. Coach, you have an opportunity to have someone drafted in the first round for the

third year in a row. What does that mean to the program?

COACH FERENTZ: It's, again, a real credit to the two individuals that have been picked, and certainly in Riley's case, for sure he'll be a first rounder. It speaks well to what they've done, and all three of those guys are just hard working guys really. From the day they walked in here, they had a lot of pride in what they did. So it's easy to coach players like that, and that makes it a lot of fun.

I think also, again, it's like the combine thing. I think it speaks well to the support staff that we have here. Our coaches, I think, do a really good job of developing the guys on the field, and the role that Chris and his staff, Chris Doyle and his staff play is huge. That was one of our building blocks when we started out here 13 years ago. That was something we really felt we had to try to maximize. It goes back to Mark's question about the guys we recruit. If a guy is willing to work hard at that phase, we feel like maybe we can move him ahead a little bit there.

I think for the most part that's been a commonality for guys that have been drafted. They've done a good job in the strength and conditioning phase of things. Which means they've got to love it. You've got to love it because that's a lot of hard work. Got to be aware of your diet and all that stuff too. Hard for college guys sometimes.

Q. I know you knew what you were getting with Brian, you went through and you hired him and all that. What was it like, though, the first seeing him be his coach. He's following some pretty personal footsteps for you. It must have been maybe a little nerve-racking at first. I don't know.

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. I kind of felt like I knew what to expect from him and LeVar, the same way because I've been around those guys as players. Not that they were coaching when they were playing, but they had a maturity about them that you could envision them no different than the Stoopses. I remember Bobby when he was here as a player. There was just something about him that I could see him coaching real easily. Those aren't the only guys.

I'm not putting those two in that class, but some guys just kind of have that knack when they play. You can see them doing it real easily. I think

really pleased with the whole staff and the way it worked this spring. Going into it, that was a question for me. I was a little -- not concerned about it, but you never know. You get through the one phase where everybody is working pretty hard, pretty close quarters in the office, and then when you actually start the coaching phase and going off tape and the whole thing. Really pleased with the way the meetings went, the communication with our players, the teaching that was going on with everybody.

We had a lot of changes this spring. Other than Lester Erb and Erik Campbell, it was pretty much new at every spot. I think the players responded well. The staff chemistry, the way everybody worked together for the most part was good.

The defense always tries to snipe. That happens on every campus. It's as old as time. It was good. I was really happy with the way things went that way.

Coming out from spring ball well, and we're a little deeper in some spots. Feel really good.

Q. Did you watch the bubble go down at all?

COACH FERENTZ: I missed it. It happened pretty quick. We were in a meeting, watching tape, what have you. It was almost nondramatic, anti-climactic, and it was gone. I never saw those trees by the dental building. That was kind of neat. It's going to be a beautiful parking lot, no question about it. Hope we get a view of it from our office, maybe put a little sky Cam in there, something like that. It's a lot of change, so it's neat to see.

Q. What does it mean to football that you'll have the new facility ready to go?

COACH FERENTZ: It's exciting. We've been lucky so far. We're all parking out there in front of Kinnick right now, which is great. We've had beautiful mornings to walk in. Beautiful afternoons to walk out. I didn't have to walk in that rain on Thursday, last Thursday. That might not be that much fun.

But just all the construction, I think, as soon as the structure actually started going up, I think that got all of us kind of juiced up a little bit. We're excited about that. It's going to be great to have that facility available and even more exciting to know it's going to push right out to the

transportation center out there. It's painful while it's going on, but it's going to be great once it's completed. We're excited about that.

Thank you.

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