

**April 15, 2015**



An Interview With:

## **BRIAN FERENTZ**

**BRIAN FERENTZ:** I would start by just sharing a little bit about where we're at right now. We lost three very talented, very integral guys in January. We said goodbye to those guys. I think the biggest key for us right now is going to be developing some players to play on the outside for us. We're looking to replace both tackles. On the inside we have a little bit more depth. We have a few guys coming back that have played significant minutes, started some games for us. That's not as pressing a concern right now, but the outside, certainly trying to find some guys to fill the big shoes that were left behind, and then as a unit try to develop a little bit of consistency, and hopefully we can find more than five guys that can play for us. That's usually a beneficial thing to our football team as the season goes on.

That's kind of what the score is right now, and I'd open it up to questions.

**Q. When you look at Boone Myers, a walk-on guy, what are some of the strengths that you've seen, and it's unfair to compare him with Brandon, but is he on track that he could be comparable to him at the end of his career?**

**BRIAN FERENTZ:** Right now he's trying to get on the track to perhaps start his first football game at the University of Iowa, so I think you're right, it's not fair, and I don't want to compare him to anyone. He's Boone. Boone has done a very good job. He's a competitive young guy. He's a tough guy, and he hates to lose. I think those are three really good traits. You just start right there. He also happens to be pretty athletic. He's done a very nice job putting on some weight, getting stronger, doing some of those things. I think at this point the most important thing that can happen for him, Ike Boettger, Cole Croston, any of those guys,

is just to get reps, and to get repetitions against quality players, which we're pretty fortunate that they get a chance to work against quality guys every day, and I think we probably could have a much more in-depth conversation maybe about what track he's on in a year. I hope it's a good track. I hope you're still asking a similar question to that. I think he does, too.

Right now the biggest focus for him is going to be to take some of those tangible athletic things he has, some of those intangible character things he has and put those to use on Saturdays in the fall, and if he does a good job with that, then we can talk a little bit further. But right now I just hope he plays well today when we go out to practice, then tomorrow, then perhaps Saturday, next week, and then we can talk about August when we get there.

But every day right now is just a learning experience for these guys, so I don't think we want to look too far into the future.

**Q. You got Austin Blythe back at center, how does that help to have him in the middle of that line?**

**BRIAN FERENTZ:** You never want to break in a new center, and we went through that three years ago -- I'm losing track of time now. Went through that three years ago when James left and Austin moved over to center, and we were able to have some consistency at that position for about 18, 19 games, and then when Jordan got injured in the Indiana game, we had to make a decision, and what we felt like the best thing to do at that moment for the football team was to move Austin to guard, let Tommy Gaul go in there and play center, and Tommy Gaul performed very well, very well, so after that we just felt like the best thing from a consistency standpoint up front was to leave Tommy at center, keep Austin at guard, and he had to flip back and forth on either side a couple times. So he actually ended up being the

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guy that did the most moving last year when you look at the big picture.

Having him move back to center, I think that's his best position. I think he'd probably tell you that's his best position for whatever reason, and it's a good thing. It's a good thing that we have a center with experience, that's started games, that's played in big games, and also happens to be a pretty good player. Those are all good things. Those are all positive things.

I think the issue for us right now is trying to find somebody to play center if he can't because that's a very real possibility. You never know what's going to happen on every snap, and I don't think -- I think we feel good about our depth on the inside, not necessarily at the center position, though. Eric Simmons may have to play center. We've got Steve Ferentz, who has done a nice job, and we'll see how that goes. We've had some guys snapping the football a little bit that maybe haven't been on the depth chart yet trying to figure out if they can do it, and then you have young guys coming in, too: James Daniels, Jake Newborg, and we just have to find somebody that can go in there and be Johnny-on-the-spot the way that Tommy was last year, because I think one of the things that got overshadowed -- there's a lot of things that get overshadowed when you have the Outland Trophy winner playing left tackle, but what Tommy Gaul did for the football team last year, really hard to measure, hard to put into words.

**Q. A year ago at this time you kind of went on a soapbox for the Outland Trophy winner, when you saw the year he had. How gratifying will it be for you to see him take that next step?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I don't know how gratifying it'll be for me. I'll be happy for him. I think he's put in a lot of hard work, and I don't want to talk too much about him. Obviously he's moving on to the next chapter in his life and we're moving on to the next chapter in Iowa football. But I'll be happy for him, and I just hope that he ends up somewhere where they're going to continue to coach him and continue to push him. I really believe his best football is ahead of him, and I think people ask when they come through the building why wouldn't you draft this guy, why would you draft this guy, I say, look, if you can take a guy who's playing pretty well right now but has a chance to play even better in the future, why would you not do that? I'll be really happy for him. Is it gratifying for me? Usually the best coaches have

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the best players, so I don't for one second think I have anything to do with what Brandon has accomplished. He's worked really hard. He's overcome a lot of adversity, and he's achieved a very high level, so I'll be very happy for him and I'll be very happy for his family.

**Q. Talk about the true freshmen that are coming in. You've got a couple on campus already. Who has a chance to compete right away?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, right now James Daniels is the only one practicing with us. Brett is working through a shoulder rehabilitation, so we're able to get him on the field and do some work, but he can't do anything really competitive against the defense, so if I had to handicap it right now I'd say that James Daniels has the best chance to help us because he's the only one that I've seen practice. So I'll be interested to see the other four guys practice. It's been very difficult historically to get on the field as a true freshman here at that position, and there's a reason for that. Basically the closer you are to the football, the least ready you are physically to play the game, or mentally for that matter because it's really all the same.

But James has done a nice job, and he's gotten a lot of reps, so right now he leads the race but it's kind of by default, waiting for some other guys to jump in and join the race.

**Q. Where do you see him fitting in on the line?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think he's interior player for us right now. He's not the tallest guy in the world. He has long arms. He's a good athlete, and he would fill any of the criteria you're looking for at any of the three inside positions, so I think that's where his future will be on our football team, like an Austin Blythe, or an Eric Simmons or a Jordan Walsh. Probably not going to see those guys line up at tackle for us unless we really got into a pinch. That's how I would see him.

**Q. You are the run game coordinator right now. Can you talk about that job, what it entails, and also what changes you might make to the run game?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I wouldn't foresee any radical changes in our run game. You know, the people who taught me anything that I know about football were essentially the architects of this run

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game anyway, so I wouldn't see any changes there.

I think a lot -- you guys' job is to write stories and to create stories and do all those things. I think if you look around the country, this is a pretty common thing. If you walk down that hallway in there, which none of you are invited to do, that's the nice thing about this building; there's locks and key fobs and things like that, but if you were to walk down that hallway, I think there's nine -- well, I know there's nine full-time assistants on our staff. There's five that carry some type of coordinator title, so if more than half of your assistants are coordinators, my question would be what is really in a title.

But it's just a matter of, I think we wanted to simplify the teaching from the standpoint of if you're going to have a meeting then there needs to be one voice, so to create one voice, that's a good thing when we all get together, but I think it's important to remember that as an offensive staff we have five very capable, very qualified coaches on that staff that all have a tremendous amount of input. This is really just a clerical, I don't know -- it's almost a formality. I don't think it really means too much, if that answers the question.

**Q. Ike has always seemed to have been open to playing offensive line. I'm not sure how that dialogue went down, but to me that willingness is probably a great place to start.**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, if he's not willing, there's probably no beginning.

**Q. Yeah, right.**

BRIAN FERENTZ: We recruited Ike as a tight end, and he came to camp here, he was a big, oversized quarterback when he came to camp here. He had played quarterback, and he'd done a little bit -- they'd lined him up outside and threw some fade balls to him and used his size. Good basketball player, just a big, good-looking guy, and you looked at him and you said, I don't know what he does, but he looks like he could do something, so when he came to camp we asked him to catch balls. Caught balls, caught everything we threw at him, moved around very well for a guy his size. He was about 220 pounds then. And then we asked him to bring his pads back the next day, so when we have one-day camps the skill players don't wear pads, just the linemen, and Coach Morgan and I take the linemen down there and just beat up on those guys for about two hours while the skill

guys are playing games and getting prizes and all the stuff they do.

We asked him to come back the next day with his pads. The first real positive sign was that he came back the next day with his pads, and then he went out there, and I've got to tell you he was not impressive blocking people because he'd never done it before in his life, but he was very willing. He was very competitive, and he never became discouraged or embarrassed or anything like that, which I think is a good thing because if you are in that line of work, it's kind of like being a corner; nobody notices when a cornerback plays very well for 75 snaps. He has one bad snap, my wife can tell you he didn't play well.

Being a tackle is very similar, so that was a good start, and then we got him on campus, obviously we offered him a scholarship, he committed to us, he came down on campus, he started as a tight end. He was with us on and off that summer, better part of two months that first year, and then really as we got -- what happened was in practice when we'd want to work some of those younger guys, we didn't have a full complement, and so we just kind of made the decision, hey, we think this is where it's headed anyway. He had already gained about 25 pounds. Why don't we just make the transition if he's open to it. He was very open to it. I don't think it hurts to have some of the guys that were recruiting him to come into the room with us, and he stepped in, and since the first day he joined the group, he's been very eager and anxious to be a good offensive lineman. He's very far from that right now, but he's got some physical tools, more importantly I really, really feel strongly about the way he approaches every day, and I think that he's going to have success. There's no guarantees in life, and right now he's learning daily, and it's kind of like both tackles, it's the school of hard knocks, and they're really getting a crash course.

I think for them every day coming back to work and trying again, that's quite an accomplishment, and so if we can just build on that, we should be okay. But he wants to be a good player, and that's a good place to start. But at some point you have to become one, too, so that will be the next step for him.

**Q. What did you like about Ike in that Ball State game in the short time that he played?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Well, I liked that he went out on the field. That was a good start because when I turned and looked at him he had a look in his eyes that maybe was not encouraging, so getting him across the white line onto the field, that was a good start. He went out there and it wasn't too big for him. He didn't play well. He didn't look very good doing it, but the wheels didn't come off, and he lived to fight another day. And then we were able to later in the year work him into some games as a bigger tight end. We put him in a different jersey, but we were able to give him a little bit more experience doing things like that, too. He's just always got a smile on his face; it's never too big for him.

I think right from the start, you at least got the impression that, hey, this guy has a chance. He at least has a chance because some guys getting over that initial hurdle is something that is very tough. He just kind of went out there and did it, and he lived to fight another day. That's when we told him when he came off the field at the end of the series, hey, look, you made it, you're alive, you didn't get beat, and really nobody probably knows who you are, and the only reason anybody knew you were in the game is because the guy that just left the field, everybody is probably losing their mind over that one. Otherwise nobody would have noticed you. That's the good thing when you're an offensive lineman.

**Q. Was it difficult to evaluate the offensive line last year? Coach White talked about Mark being a fullback playing tailback. Did you see things, maybe holes that were there that your guys were doing well that maybe didn't pay off?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: No, I think the way anybody is evaluated is wins and losses, so was it difficult to evaluate the offensive line last year? No, we won seven games and we lost six. I don't think that's hard to evaluate at all. Did we run the ball for X amount of yards? I think all those things can be a little bit overrated. When you look at rushing numbers and the way they ballooned just in the last six or seven years, well, there's been a shift of offensive philosophy across the country, passing numbers have declined, and at one time, that wasn't the case. It was the opposite. My guess is we'll all live to see it return the other way.

So we try not to get too caught up on what are the numbers, what are we doing here, what are we doing there. If you win the game, you're playing well enough, if you lose the game you're

not playing well enough. Whether it's in the run game or protection or any of those things, I think when you look at the bottom line from last year, we didn't perform to the standard that we set around here and the expectations that we have.

Without getting into were there holes, were there not holes, I don't even think you go that far. I think you start with did you win the game, did you lose the game, and if you played 13, how many did you win and how many did you lose.

**Q. In your mind what were the things that you guys did well last year overall?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: You're talking about as a football team?

**Q. As a football team. When you went back to the drawing book in January, what was the main focus?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: We lost close ballgames last year, and when we have a good football team, when we have a healthy program, we don't lose close ballgames, we win close ballgames. So when you look at the games we lost and you look at the ways we lost those games, I don't think you have to look too much further than that. We didn't get the things done that we needed to do. We did not establish the run consistently enough. We didn't protect the passer well enough. I guess I'm living in my world right now, but that's really all I can control and that's what I focus on.

When you don't do those things very well and you don't play well in the fourth quarter of close ballgames, you're not going to be happy with the result, and that's not how we've had success around here. We've had success by getting into close football games and winning them at the end, and you look at our football team two years ago, we were able to do that. You look at our football team last year, we weren't able to, so that's to me what we have to fix immediately.

**Q. Welsh has been gone. Kirk mentioned family issues. You recruited him. How much contact have you had with him, and how much do you miss him from a developmental standpoint up front?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. That's a good question, and I understand the question, and it's kind of like any player, I wouldn't go into conversations I have with a player behind closed doors, and I think those things should stay

between a coach and a player. But the head coach addressed Sean's situation, and I wish I could, but I don't think it would be right for me to comment really any further.

**Q. I just wondered how it's hindered you guys developmentally wise on the offensive line.**

BRIAN FERENTZ: I think it's given other guys opportunities. We have other injuries going on. Obviously Ross Reynolds isn't practicing with us right now. He wasn't out there Saturday, so when guys aren't practicing, Brett Waechter is not out there, other guys have opportunities. I think you can look at it perhaps as a hindrance. I don't know that any of us as coaches ever have that leeway or that good fortune to say that this hinders us.

I think what you have to look at is the opportunity that it presents for other football players. Eric Simmons is a guy who has kind of fluctuated between guard and center. Is he really in the two deep -- we put a two deep out. He's always been in the two deep. But last year when we lost a guard, we moved Austin Blythe to guard and put Tommy Gaul in at center. Obviously Eric wasn't in the top six or seven at that point. Well, he's been thrust into the top five now, and I think he's done pretty well. I really do. I look at it and say has it hindered us developmentally? Obviously you wish Sean was getting the reps. You wish that Ross Reynolds was getting the reps, but they're not. They can't be out there.

So the guys that are getting the reps, what are they doing with them, and I think the good news is Eric has really taken advantage of the opportunity and we're really pleased with where he's at right now. Don't print all of that. He's got a long way to go.

**Q. Whose idea was the run game coordinator title? How did that come about?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: The head coach told me that I was the run game coordinator and he released it to you guys. It certainly wasn't my idea.

**Q. What was your conversation? Did you say, What does that mean, or --**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Again, I'd kind of go back and refer to the previous question. Conversations that happen between coaches, between players, any of those things that happen behind closed doors, I'll leave those behind closed doors, whether that's right or wrong, whether you

guys agree with it or not. You'd have to ask him. If he was comfortable divulging our conversation then he could tell you, but I'm not going to do that.

**Q. I think you guys are at 14 scholarship offensive linemen right now. What in your mind is the optimum number? I know you guys have been working with less than that the last couple years.**

BRIAN FERENTZ: That's a good question, and I think it's fluid. I think whatever is best for the football team at that period in time, and that's changed year to year, and based on where we have needs, where we don't have needs, how much we've gotten out of a certain class, how much we haven't gotten out of a certain class, team-wide. Right now we took five last year, and I think we all agreed we needed to take five, and that's why we did it. We had a really good class in state. There were a lot of really good players in state across the board, and there were certainly a lot of good offensive linemen in the state, too.

At the end of the day, when you're limited by numbers, you can't take everybody. I wish that you could.

We made a decision, we had four guys that we took in state that we really liked, and we were able to convince them to come play at Iowa, and then the fifth guy was James Daniels who we were very involved in the recruitment. We felt like we were right in there with everyone else, but we also knew that that could have gone several ways for him. He had a lot of options because he's a good player.

So I think when we ended up with five, that was a good thing. Where we're at this year, I don't know. I'm sure Seth could comment on it better than I can. That's why you have coordinators. It's really important that people are in charge, so I'll defer to Seth on that one. I'm only kidding.

I don't know how many we'll take. I know we'll take at least two, maybe more, and we'll see how that goes. But as far as where do we get the whole number at? I don't know. I think if you're any lower than 12, you're probably skating on some thin ice. Where we've been very fortunate and we've been able to play with our numbers is we've had really strong walk-on. Just look at our tackle depth right now. I think there's two walk-ons that could contribute for us right now. We had a walk-on start six games for us last year, so we've been fortunate in that regard and maybe we get

away with a little bit more than some other people, but certainly I'd take as many as I could get.

**Q. You coached Aaron Hernandez and you coached alongside his brother here. First of all, how difficult what happened today is it for you personally, and then also to be there to try to support DJ?**

BRIAN FERENTZ: Sure. I think it's probably a lot harder for DJ than it is for me. These things are unfortunate, and really I don't think it benefits Iowa football or myself to comment on the situation other than it's tragic. It's certainly much more tragic for the victims involved, but these types of things, they affect everyone. I feel bad for DJ and for his family, but I feel worse for the victims in this case. Things like this, again, I think the reason you don't comment is what can you really say. I don't know what I could say that would make any sense to me or to anyone in here and wouldn't be picked apart. I think it's very difficult for DJ, and I think it's more difficult for the victims. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did.

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