

October 12, 2010



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Just to start out real quick, our captains remain the same. We've got Adrian Clayborn, Karl Klug defensively and Ricky Stanzi and the aforementioned Julian Vandervelde will be on offense.

We had a bye week last week, so I think it came at a good time, an opportune time for us to get some rest and also work some younger guys along.

We came out of that. I think we're doing okay, and now we turn our sights towards this week's opponent. So we've got a big challenge ahead of us right now, travel up to Michigan, play an excellent football team, 5-1 record right now. Really like any Michigan team, they've got an awful lot of good players, and I think the other part about it is unlike a year ago maybe where they were still to me probably in a transition mode, I think they've clearly transitioned right now, and it looks like everybody is a lot more comfortable with what's being asked of them. They've got a very good football team, present a lot of challenges to us, and traveling on the road makes it a little bit more of a challenge, as well.

I read where somebody cited this last week that we've lost eight of our last 11 in Ann Arbor. There's probably a good reason for that, probably the fact they have a good team when you go up there, and I think this game would fall in that category.

We've got a good challenge in front of us, and we'll go to work today and hopefully piece some things together.

Q. Denard Robinson, you saw him a little bit last year in that game, but he was a little bit more one-dimensional than he is this

year. What do you see on him that's allowed him to do what he's done so far?

COACH FERENTZ: He's an excellent football player, and I'm guessing what they hoped to get from him when they recruited him is what they've seen happen this year. He's a very dynamic football player, very explosive player, and with that offense that they give you, it presents an awful lot of challenges. They try to spread the field and basically have an extra man on the field because they've got a guy that can not only throw it but he can run the ball. He's very dangerous.

It really makes it a challenge for you defensively when you play a team like this, and that's kind of what we're looking at here.

Q. Is there anybody on the team that can replicate what he does in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. I mean, we're fooling around, but if we had somebody like that, we'd probably be running that same offense, I guess.

Q. Would you compare him to Randle El?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it came to my mind. They're not the same players, but the pressure they put on you I think is comparable. That's the comparison I would use. As we know firsthand, he was an extremely dangerous player, got a Kodak moment, I thought that one time we had him caught in 2000 when I think it was a 4th and 1, Aaron Kampman had him by the back of his pads and he still kicked the ball out.

They put the same kind of pressure on you. They're a little bit different players but they put the same kind of pressure on you and they're the catalyst of a very explosive, high-powered offense, and I think that was true when Randle El was at Indiana. They were a very tough team to defend, and I think Michigan is the same way.

Q. What's the secret of attacking a player with that kind of skill set?

COACH FERENTZ: No one guy is going to defend him. It's like any good offensive team, whether you're playing a really proficient passing team or an option team or whatever, but if you're playing a team that's good offensively, you'd better rely on the whole team. I think that's really what they do. He puts pressure on you because you may think he's going to run it and then he pulls up and throws it down the field. He's got that ability. If guys get aggressive, the guys are responsible for passes first. If they get too aggressive, we're going to get burned on that.

And then conversely if you wait for him to get across the line, he's not easy to catch. He's got great speed, and he's proven to be very durable, as well. So it puts a lot of pressure on you.

Q. How much will you use what Michigan State did against Michigan?

COACH FERENTZ: We're built differently, but I think conceptually, if you can be very sound and if everybody takes care of their responsibilities and does a good job that way, at least you have a chance to maybe contain them a little bit. It's funny, you know, after the game, what a tough game for the guy, he had 300-plus yards offense, so most people would be celebrating that, and there was a lot of doom and gloom, at least I heard on the networks and all that stuff. So that just kind of puts it all right there in perspective. It wasn't like they just shut him down. But it's going to be a tough challenge for us.

Q. You've talked about Denard and his ability, but is this the best receiving corps you've seen this season?

COACH FERENTZ: Time will tell, but I'm trying to think of the last time we saw Michigan without good receivers going back 20 years of experience. They've got a bunch of guys that can run around and make plays, so it's kind of choose your poison. I mean, they've got good players at every position offensively, offensive line, their backs, and certainly the quarterback. But you can't just defend one thing when you're playing them, and that's what makes it a challenge.

Q. Do you expect Jeff Tarpinian to play this week?

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a shot. I don't know if it's a good shot, we'll see. But he's got a shot.

Q. Did he reinjure his neck at Penn State when he came in the second quarter?

COACH FERENTZ: Right, yeah.

Q. Is that dangerous just because of the --

COACH FERENTZ: It's not dangerous, it's just hard to predict how effective he'll be. If it was a danger he wouldn't be in there and won't be in there this week if he is. We don't anticipate that, but it's a matter of effectiveness and durability. It's not one of those injuries you can say, okay, a week from now he'll be here. It's just one of those things how he responds daily.

Q. How fragile are you at middle linebacker then?

COACH FERENTZ: Pretty fragile. By my count if he's not in there it's our first two guys out. Troy Johnson is fine, so hopefully he'll be able to go and play the whole game. James Morris stepped in and did a great job, and we're at that point of the season, a lot of teams are, where you're going to have some other guys step in and get it done.

I think that's certainly a position like our running back position right now where we're just going to have to count on young players coming in and doing a good job for us.

Q. On that subject, I think you went into the week wanting to develop your No. 2 and 3 running backs, Marcus Coker and Brad Rogers. Did you get it done or --

COACH FERENTZ: They're better than they were a week ago. I don't know if they're good enough, but they're better. That's the important thing, and that's all we were hoping for. But it was a good week to give them some exposure, more exposure, more practice at things they haven't really had a chance to work hard enough. They're going to be fine, but a year from now I'll be feeling a lot better about them. We'll have other concerns then probably, but they'll be okay. They'll get there.

Q. Do you still expect it to be pretty much Adam Robinson most of the way then?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, I would say flashback to '03, '02, it would be the Fred Russell plan where he was our primary ball carrier. And we'll have to play other guys, there's no question about that. But if Adam can go, he'll go, and if we have to rest him during the week, we'll do that. We'll do whatever it takes. But it's not unusual or abnormal to just feature one guy back there.

Q. How is Coach Parker doing?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot better, yeah, a lot better. Continues to improve. We're all really pleased about that, and I think we're anxious to get him back.

Q. Will he make the trip?

COACH FERENTZ: No, he won't, no. I think we're still looking at weeks. I would guess a minimum of two weeks, but it may be quicker, but probably at least that.

Q. What about Michigan's defensive challenges?

COACH FERENTZ: They've given up some plays at times, some big plays, but again, they've got a lot of good players on that defensive unit. They've got a scheme that's unique, presents a lot of challenges for you. So it won't be anything easy.

And I just look back at last year's game, they really made it tough for us to move the football. That's kind of what we would expect again this year. I think they've changed a little bit maybe, but philosophically they're really the same. It's the second year now with that defensive coordinator, his system, so it's kind of like the offense. I think the players are more responsive to what they're being asked to do, and they make it tough on you. So we're going to have to really be at our best.

Q. What sort of challenges does that present? You talked about it being a unique defense.

COACH FERENTZ: It starts with they have good players. They've got a lot of talented players and they do some things that are a little bit different than, quote-unquote, if there's such a thing as a standard defense, so it's a week I think where our guys are really going to have to be very sharp on the game plan and really our communication is going to have to be good. That's

going to be a little bit of a challenge on the road certainly.

Q. Do you buy into the mystique of Michigan anymore at all, or has that kind of worn off, or how much is that a factor?

COACH FERENTZ: All I know is all I know, and I guess what I didn't know is that we were 8 of 11 in the negative column. I didn't know that until last Tuesday or Wednesday when I read that. But it's not surprising. Traditionally they've had a great program, and we're going up to play a 5-1 team that we had our work cut out last year and were fortunate to win that football game.

It's going to be a heck of a football game. I think all our conference games are going to be that way. None of the other ones really concern me that much right now. It's going to be a big challenge for us, and they've got a lot of good football players and they've got a good team, and we're going to have to -- it's, I guess, the biggest stadium there is now. But when you go on the road in our conference, that's what you expect, and you have to raise your level of play.

Q. What did you think of when you heard that their stadium can now seat 113,000?

COACH FERENTZ: I actually accidentally read that somewhere last week. I mean, I wasn't looking for it, but it was in something I read. I didn't think much. I thought it was pretty big the last time we were there. How much bigger is it, 3,000 people or something like that? 110, 113, really doesn't matter. Big is big.

Q. You've had a lot of national media here for different stories on the football field, but to have somebody here doing a story on Julian Vandervelde, not just the football but the singing and everything else, really unique kid.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Julian is a renaissance man if we've ever had one, he and President Skorton. David Skorton, for those of you who don't know, was that way. He and Julian would get along pretty well, have a lot of varied interests, and I imagine part of the feature was one of the first moments I remember was Julian getting up and singing at the Alamo Bowl as a true freshman. He sucked everybody in and just belted out the theme song from the "Phantom of the Opera." That was good. That was kind of my first exposure to some of the diverse talents that he

has. He's a delightful young guy, has been a very good football player for us, too, but a delightful young guy, and I'd venture to say probably has as diverse interests as anybody we've ever had come through the program. It's at least good interests. Maybe we've had some guys with some funny ones, I don't know. But Julian is a pretty unique guy.

Q. What's he going to be when he grows up?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a great question. He's got a lot of things he's interested in. He's taking courses that I probably couldn't spell, let alone take. He's an amazing guy.

Q. You talked going back to a little bit of the history of Michigan and all, they're also kind of one of those programs that's a little bit of a barometer, that if you can succeed against them. What did that win in 2002 do you think mean to the program at that time? You were kind of an under-the-radar 6 and 1 team, but you won and it seemed like the outlook changed for you guys.

COACH FERENTZ: We were. I think it's probably one of the few times, maybe the only time where we really got some strong momentum. I guess two games isn't momentum, last two games of '08. That's a stretch, to say two games is momentum.

But after that ballgame, and nobody expected that, it was just one of those days where we made a couple plays and all of a sudden things started going pretty well. After that I thought that team had it rolling pretty good. We may have had a close game or two. I can't remember if Indiana was right before or after that. But we had it going pretty good.

It was one of those rare things that happen sometimes, and the team kind of caught fire and pushed it right through. Totally opposite of '04, totally opposite. But the only problem is that was eight years ago. Maybe we'll get Clark and Sanders to come back this week, some of those guys, Gallery (smiling).

Q. Apparently the sound at the big house is louder now, the way they've rebuilt the stadium. How do you replicate that kind of noise, or do you change it based on what it was before?

COACH FERENTZ: We play a little noise typically on Wednesdays here, which is kind of

aggravating, but you do it anyway. But again, I just go back to a year ago, it was pretty loud all those places we went last year, and as I say, you get 80,000, 100,000, it's really not a lot different, it'll be loud in there. We're just going to have to really do a good job.

Q. What did you think when you saw the Michigan State-Michigan game, assuming you did. What did you take away from that just as a whole, both teams?

COACH FERENTZ: I thought it was an extremely competitive game and hard-fought game. Both teams really, I thought, played extremely hard. You'd expect that. It's a Big Ten game first of all, it's intrastate rival, so a lot going on from that standpoint. Really it was like last year's game when the two played. Obviously different stadium, but both teams competed hard last year and that was a good game. I think that was overtime, I believe. It wasn't like anybody ran away with it. I thought both teams really competed hard, and either team could have won.

It's weird watching it on TV. It's weird to watch a game on TV, but I did see most of it. You kind of get a feel for what's going on out there.

Q. Did it alter year feelings at all about either team?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I thought Saturday morning they were both really good football teams and went to bed thinking the same thing.

Q. How does Arizona's -- when it comes to stopping the run game, Arizona was successful against you guys and they loaded the box a lot. How does Michigan's speed or athleticism compare to that, or could they do something similar? Different alignment.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I guess my vantage point is a little different. To me when you fall behind three touchdowns, it really -- it's kind of like stats right now; overall stats for the season really don't matter a whole heck of a lot, maybe with the exception of turnovers.

And conversely, when you pick a game out like that and say somebody stopped the run, I mean, I'm more focused on the blocked punt, the interception and the kick return. To me that was the story of that game. I don't know that the run was or wasn't. Maybe I'm missing the boat, but

that's all I'm looking at is just those three plays, and the blocked PAT. That to me was the story of that game as much as anything.

Q. What kind of a week did your kickers have and how is Daniel Murray doing?

COACH FERENTZ: He's doing better. We're doing okay. I'm not saying great, I'm not saying bad, but we're okay.

Q. People talk about what you guys did against Georgia Tech in the Orange Bowl. Is that applicable here at all?

COACH FERENTZ: Sort of, kind of, but not totally. It's just a different offense. But sort of kind of, in that, again, it's a little bit off the beaten path of what we would see normally, and a lot of different guys that can hurt you. So that's similar. Georgia Tech's quarterback was different, yet he could really make it tough on you, too.

But clearly here this is -- the quarterback is the catalyst in the whole thing. But it's like Georgia Tech in that they've got other ways to beat you, and they can -- again, so you've got to get back to playing good defense. At times you might choose lean left or lean right, but you do the same thing. It's a great passing attack. If a team just came out and did 65 snaps a game, I would assume they're good at it if they're doing that, and then you'd have to try to decide which way you're going to lean and under what circumstances.

Q. We heard a bunch of defensive terms this week like leverage and inside out and all that kind of stuff.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's important against a passing team, too. I'm not saying these guys aren't a passing team, but just that's what defense is all about is really understanding where you've got to be. And then the trick here with this situation is this quarterback, even if you think you've got him, you may not have him. And that's Randle El, too; we thought we had him and we didn't have him, and it's like, crap, what are you going to do. You're chasing is what happens, and it's tough to chase this quarterback because he's really fast.

Q. How does playing a guy like Denard change what your guys on the defensive line are going to do? Do they play a little bit more contained?

COACH FERENTZ: Again, they'd better understand what their role is, what their

assignment is. If you get out of your lane or whatever your area of responsibility might be against Nathan Chandler, okay, who's a good quarterback for us, but it's not quite as critical, but if we leave a little window open there, this guy may just pull it down and go, and we've got a bunch of folks chasing him then. It's a little different dynamic that way. You still have to be aggressive but you can't be careless at all because it's hard.

Q. What's your process for evaluating the kickers on a week-to-week basis and deciding --

COACH FERENTZ: Just watch them. You watch them practice, and we chart all that stuff and I really look at that. Usually you can just kind of feel how it's going and predict what the charts would say. So you just watch them and kind of go from there.

Q. You talked a little bit about Troy Johnson. He's not a journeyman because he's at the same college all five years, but he's really played a lot of positions for you and kind of an unsung guy.

COACH FERENTZ: He is. He's one of those guys like in baseball that can do a lot of things. The first thing I think of when you mentioned that is just -- he stepped in in game 12 last week or last year for Jeremiha, ends up getting the Big Ten player of the week, did some really good things for us, and we played good defense that day.

He's a guy that's very intelligent, and I don't mean that to diminish his physical skills, but it starts there. He can really play all three of our positions. He knows those inside and out. He's very diligent with his preparation, and when he's given an opportunity he's played well and he's been a very good special teams player for us, too. He is kind of one of those guys off the radar a little bit that really does a good job.

I just got off the phone with the Michigan folks, and everybody's question is always about our defensive line for obvious reasons and good reasons, but it's kind of like our two other guys are pretty good and pretty veteran, Sash and Greenwood, and it's like they don't exist, and that's probably my fault. But Troy is a guy that's been with us five years, really is a good player, a dependable player, and for us to be successful we need guys like that on our football team. We're

really glad he's here.

Q. Are those guys hard to hang -- he's a fifth year senior who's been a backup mostly. Those seem to be more rare.

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a great attitude, and I think true, most fifth year seniors -- we've got a lot of fifth year seniors that aren't starting on our team. They love being on the team, it's important to them, and they take pride in their roles, and Troy has always been that. He's always been a good special teams player for us for a couple years now, and he enjoys it and he takes pride in it. For us to be successful that's what we need. We need a lot of guys like that.

Q. Do you try to get more speed on defense when you have a quarterback like --

COACH FERENTZ: If you can find some.

Q. Does your personnel maybe change?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't see us varying from what we are. We are what we are. We run okay on defense. I wouldn't describe us as slow. But we don't have anybody with his speed. We're just not going to find anybody unless we talk to Larry Wiczorek and find out if he's got a couple guys available. I hope we're not chasing him from behind, because we're going to lose.

Q. You're coming up on the 25th anniversary of another Iowa-Michigan game here, No. 1 against No. 2. I'm just wondering what you remember from that game.

COACH FERENTZ: You bring up good moments. I remember a lot of good things. I liked the end, I remember that. I liked that a lot. The overall environment on that day was awfully electric, so that was great. Any time you walk away with a win in that series, it's good. It's very gratifying, and that was a hard fought game, as was that '02 one. The score got a little bit lopsided, but it didn't come easy. That was a very tough game. Thank God Bob Sanders fell on that punt, fumbled punt and what have you, then obviously the stop and drive in '85. Pretty big.

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