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An Interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Obviously we're really happy to conclude the recruiting season and just very happy the way it turned out. An awful lot of hard work went into our recruiting like it always does. And I think the staff did a great job. Eric Johnson is our recruiting coordinator, gave us great direction.

And I think everybody on the staff worked extremely hard. We got a lot of help from our support staff, members of the faculty, people involved with our facilities and right on down through.

So really appreciative of everybody's efforts; and, again, very, very happy about the class. It was a little bit of an unusual year for us in that a lot of our commitments, we really knew about, I guess, all but three of them prior to the end of our season. So that's a little bit unusual and probably just part of a national trend for sure.

Obviously, we graduated some outstanding players off of last year's team. So we had voids to feel, not only in terms of production, but leadership, et cetera. When a good group of players leaves your football team, it's imperative you continue to bring good players in. And I think we accomplished that.

As you know, there were 21 signings, 19 of which were captains. All these guys were multi-sport athletes. I think 18 of them participated in state playoffs. And I think 14 of them were honor roll students. So I think just those things right there probably give you -- share some ideas about the characteristics of the group.

And, again, we're just really thrilled about the way things turned out. I think we addressed

the needs we needed to address. And just really pleased. I think each and every one of the guys, from what we can tell and what we can project, is going to fit in beautifully with the way we like to operate.

So we're eager to get these guys on campus, and whenever that time may come during the course of summer. Certainly they'll all be here in August. And it will be great to welcome them to the team and see what they can do to add to the team, not only next fall, but, more importantly, over their careers. I think that's the other thing to keep in mind. Really, it's all about how their entire careers go, not the impact they make right off the bat.

So with that being said, I'll throw it out for questions.

Q. A.J., coming in the spring, is that going to give him a little bit of idea what it's like, obviously, and moving into the --

COACH FERENTZ: Was that about A.J.? We have two guys that chose to enter school this past January. It was their choice strictly. A.J. Derby obviously and Louis Trinca-Pasat.

And with A.J.'s deal, he lives in town here. He's got a pretty good familiarity with the program, the campus and the university. You could tell he was a little bit itchy, and I think ready and eager to make the next move. And I think it's going to work out beautifully. I think Louis is probably going through a little bit of a transition. He's away from home, growing up in Chicago.

But it was strictly their ideas, both cases, and I think it will help them get a jump on things and get their feet on the ground. They're already training with Chris Doyle and his staff. And they'll be involved in spring ball. So that's a good thing. I'll also go on record, I'm still a firm believer, I really think, in football, I don't think players should be allowed to start school until fall term.

I know that's kind of a foreign concept to

throw out there. But I'm just not convinced there's a great reason. Again, if it's a player's idea, that's great. But so many programs right now are making it mandatory for players to go in the summer. I just don't think that's necessarily a good thing for college football or good thing for young people.

So I'm in the minority there. And we'll run that up the flagpole maybe this spring and have it get shot down. But anyway, a little commentary.

Q. The balance of the classes has taken some time, and this class fits in well with that, the seniors, the juniors, the sophomores.

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's one thing historically we tend to be in the 18 to 22 range of signings. I'm not really good at math. I'm still trying to figure out how people sign in the 30s or even in the high 20s. I know there's a reason for it. I haven't read the fine print.

We tend to be in the 18 to 22 range, typically. That's the usual thing. Next year we've got a little bigger senior class. I think there's balance and stability throughout -- over the long haul.

And I think that's a good thing. And this year we went a little heavier maybe on defense, certainly with three of our four defensive linemen next year being seniors. The next two guys being juniors. It was real important to us to get some guys in that we felt could be involved right away. And same thing with our linebacker position, we've got a heavy group of seniors next year. We just graduated two outstanding players.

So those are two positions we felt were really, it was important to fortify. And I guess you could probably include the defensive back field also. We don't have a lot of seniors. I think Brett's the only senior next year that we'll lose. But we're a little top-ended there, too. We thought it was important to get some young guys on campus to get involved right away and hopefully be in the thick of things a year from now.

Q. Anything change for you guys with guys leaving early for the NFL or transfers and things like that late? Did that mess you guys up at all?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really dramatically. It affected, gave us a little bit more room to move in terms of giving out 21 scholarships. We were not intending to do that initially. And that kind of shook out there. So that was a good thing.

But not dramatically. And basically we're not going to fill a position, either of those two positions, we don't anticipate it, with an incoming freshman. But as far as looking down the road I think it does affect us a little bit. And that's something you're always mindful. And obviously we knew that was a possibility a year ago that these guys, you might lose juniors. That's always a possibility.

Q. You might have felt strongly about James Morris. You offered him in 2007. Did you feel any risk there? You probably knew his character. A lot of inside info on him. But on the outside it probably looked a little crazy.

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, there's risk anytime you offer. But I think we felt pretty confident. James had been in our camp. He's been in this building. We've known him a long time. I've known the Morris family basically since 1981. Greg worked here and Tim was a student manager for us.

So I've known the family a long time. Certainly James, being in our camp, I think as much as anything, and just being around our coaching staff, he's a real mature young man. He's got his head on straight. We thought he was an excellent football player, but also just the other attributes.

And I think he goes home, everything is kept in check. His ego is kept in check. He does a wonderful job with that. We felt pretty good about it. We were excited about everything we knew about him. I think after he came to camp, we saw how he competed with the older players, that really impressed us. So we thought the risk was minimal. And I think we've seen nothing but improvement from him on the field. And we're awfully excited about his potential with us.

Carl Jackson, who is now retired, still won't go in our staff room, but he did pass through the other day. He was telling me yesterday he thinks he could be a running back for us. That kind of versatility is a good thing. I certainly value Carl's opinions. But I know we need help on defense right now and down the road.

Q. Do you see him as a guy that could play next year -- the linebacker depth chart is kind of goofy.

COACH FERENTZ: It is. We've got a lot of seniors in the group right now. I think ideally,

with a couple of our linebackers, couple of our defensive linemen and possibly a couple of defensive backs, I say I'm hopeful they're not starters. If they're starters, hopefully it's because they're beating out some good players.

There aren't too many guys we're counting on to save our team next year. But they're really going to be important in our future. And we'll have the discussion down the road possibly about are you going to be a special teams guy, a back-up guy, get your feet wet, and then we're going to have a lot of vacancies a year from now. I know that. So I think he'll be in the thick of things. I think maybe all four of the linebackers we signed will have that opportunity.

Q. Could you talk about C.J. Fiedorowicz, and keeping after it with him?

COACH FERENTZ: We targeted C.J. a long time ago. I remember the first time Lester told me about him. And I think he might have been a sophomore at that point also. And we just kept an eye on him and made the offer to him.

We really felt like he connected well when he came on campus. He was here several times prior to making the decision elsewhere. And I guess we just weren't convinced that in his heart that was going to be the best thing for him, and we certainly weren't convinced it was the best thing for him either. So we stayed in contact. And when he reconsidered, his options during the course of the season, we're thrilled he came over for a ball game and came with his family.

I think he felt very comfortable with the school, with the community. And I think he also felt comfortable with his opportunities in our offense and maybe what he could do. We do play with tight ends. And he certainly is a tight end. We think he's a pretty good one.

So I think that coupled with the fact that Tony's graduating, I think it was a good timing for us. And we're eager to get him here.

Q. Could you talk about A.J.'s projection at the quarterback position, how you feel about that, what you've seen?

COACH FERENTZ: A year ago at this time I would have probably told you there's no question in our minds he was a tremendous football player, tremendous athlete, kind of a Tim Tebow discussion, if you will.

And that's really how we envisioned him. And then I was actually at -- this was in the summertime. He came over to a camp, one of our

camp, I believe it was on a Tuesday morning. Came over just for one session.

And he really impressed us with the progress and improvement that he had made. He clearly had been working on his footwork, throwing the football, that type of thing.

And it was whatever that Tuesday would have been of our camp. We were just all tremendously impressed. And after that, you know, we thought, boy, this guy, he's got a lot of upside at quarterback. I think we're getting a tremendous football player, a tremendous person.

He's a winner. And on top of that, you know, we think he's got a lot of upside at the quarterback position. If that doesn't work down the road, there's probably a lot of things he could do. Kind of like we talked about James Morris or Greenway, although Greenway was a lousy quarterback but a pretty good linebacker. That's our intent is for him to play quarterback. We're eager to see how he can progress and improve.

And if things change in our style a little bit, that's fine. Down the road we think that's he's a guy that can win and lead the football team. So we're really impressed with what he did this past year.

Q. What are your plans with Austin Vier?

COACH FERENTZ: He wants to start at quarterback. We're all for that. We'll let him have that opportunity. If he can project there, that's great. If not, then we'll probably try another position. We're thinking about tight end possibly. So there's not a great hurry, sense of urgency. Again, we saw what we liked of him. Came to camp. Really impressed us. Thought he did a lot of good things, and another guy that did a really good job of leading his football team.

Q. You have eight running backs on scholarship now. I know a lot has been made of that. And you add two more. How do you see that shaking out? How do you see playing time go there?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I hope it becomes a problem. I'm trying to think of the last time it was. Maybe it was -- do you guys remember? You have a better memory than I do.

But I can't remember us having too many good players at any one position. I certainly can't remember us having too many running backs. My

memory is a little bit recent right now. I was just happy this past year to have two in one game.

And it seems like that's kind of how it shook out years past. But I think we do have an opportunity right now to have a good group. And that's really important, because as you know we like to play with balance. We like to have tight ends on the field. More than occasionally we like to run the football if we get that opportunity. So I'm really pleased.

And I think the guys that we have complement what we needed. Certainly Marcus is a bigger back, stronger back. We haven't had a lot of guys like that. I think Sean speaks for himself there, his performance, what he did. I think that's all recent memory. Ladell Betts was a physical runner but outside of that we've had a little different style. De'Andre Johnson is someone we liked coming out of his junior year. Unfortunately he was injured this year. If he's not ready to go full speed in August, there's no sense of urgency. I think we've got enough depth right now.

We'll let that play itself out. But we're really pleased about both these guys. He's a strong player, too, not as big but he's a strong player as well. Shotgun champion. Kind of interesting. Haven't heard that too often. But interesting prospect.

Q. With your depth at running back, would you consider anyone being a Jeremy Allen fullback type?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that may be a possibility. But Brad Rogers played some fullback this year for us during practice at times and did a very nice job when he did it. But our goal there was to try to protect his eligibility, which we were fortunate we were able to do that.

And we've got certainly Brett back for his senior year. We're excited about that. And Wade Leppert. I think we're okay. We'll play along with that as we go along. But hopefully we'll be in a situation where you'll have a little depth at the running back position.

Last year we did have a little depth, like very little. So hopefully we're making some strides there.

Q. You seem to have had some success with offering late kids in-state, Brandon Myers, and Mike Elgin come to mind, and another with Tanner Miller, could you talk about what you saw?

COACH FERENTZ: You read my notes on that. You've got Myers, Elgin and Reisner in the same category. So we're hoping Adam was similar. We hope we end up with the same thing.

Tanner got on our radar a little bit late. We had him this past weekend. Phil Parker was impressed with him. Really liked their meeting. I think they had a good, nice extensive meeting.

And we just kind of feel like he fits the profile of what we're looking for in the back end. We've had a lot of success at the safety position. And I think he's got a lot of similar attributes.

And if he can pan out to be as good as the guys that we've had, they're similar to that, start with Greenwood. Sash was more highly recruited. Greenwood and Pagel. Paschal, we beat Hofstra to get him. Miguel, it wasn't a shootout, one of those deals. But they played really well for us back there. And Myers is still playing. So we're hoping it's the same kind of story.

Q. What happened on Monday that you were able to give him a scholarship?

COACH FERENTZ: Part of that we talked about some of the transition that we've had with the juniors leaving. And, you know, so we just found a little room and it worked out to be a good thing.

Q. Can you talk about the -- you've got five defensive linemen. Could you talk about where they fit in and what their strength may be?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a little bit of a projection, two of the guys are bigger than normal. We haven't had a lot of big guys. As you know, Colin Cole is probably the only guy that really came in with the kind of size of Anthony Ferguson and Carl Davis. A little bit different for us that way.

But we think all those guys have versatility and we like the attitudes of each and every one. They're all a little different story.

Carl, we don't want him to get too much bigger right now. He's a 300-pound guy right now and I think he's talking about maybe trying to be 285, 290 when he comes in here, which is probably good. He plays basketball. Impressive on the basketball court and what have you.

Anthony's in that 280 range. Big guy.

Donavan Johnson, Mike Hardy are guys I think that are going to grow, they have great growth potential. We're excited about that. Good

movement.

And then Lewis is the same kind of guy. He's played linebacker. Outside-in, that type of thing. So we think he'll grow into a down guy as well.

As far as inside and outside, we'll wait and see. I thought for sure Klug was going to be an outside guy. And that shows you what I know. We just threw him inside one day by accident because we had some guys injured and, boy, he had a really good knack for it.

So there's a guy who is a two-star recruit that probably played maybe half a step behind Clayborn. If you watch a game tape from the bowl game. Adrian played a great game and Karl Klug was right behind him.

We're anxious to get these guys on campus. We're going to need some help. I know that. Because we're really top-heavy at that position.

Q. Is there anything more unusual about this recruiting season than any other?

COACH FERENTZ: No. In fact, I think probably just the opposite. Part of it was the early commitments. And I don't know why I was thinking about this in the shower this morning, but I remember, I don't know, four or five or six years ago, one of the magazines, *Sporting News*, I think, went into a school and did-- went into the, quote/unquote, war room. We don't have a war room. I guess that's part of our problem.

But they went into the war room. And the phones were ringing and all that stuff. I remember -- I can't remember. But it was a good story. Dramatic and all that stuff. I was thinking in the shower, man, they're never going to call us because, really, this stuff is kind of boring.

We all felt pretty good last Friday, outside of one, where we were at. And we felt pretty good all the way through. There hasn't been much drama or excitement, which is okay with me. I think that's a good thing. And I'll flash back to that article. We're still here coaching and that staff's -- they've got a new staff there. So maybe drama is not a great thing on signing. But I know there's a lot of it going on with all the early commitments. You're probably going to see more decommitments with that.

But we really didn't experience that. So I don't want to say it was a routine year, but just seems like things really went pretty methodically, and we'll all know more about four years from now.

That's really about the best way to rank a recruiting class see how they do on the field.

Q. Bringing in four linebackers, how do you see that shaking out? Do you have guys slotted for middle, weak and outside?

COACH FERENTZ: I think if you pressed me right now, Austin Gray we're thinking about a middle guy, and the other guys have versatility to play outside but they could probably move inside. It's like our group right now on campus.

You know, I polled our staff the week we got back after the Bowl game, whatever day that was, Thursday, I think we met. And I asked everybody predict who our linebackers are going to be. Give them our two deep next year at linebacker. And I think I got eight different answers eight out of 10 or whatever. Kind of interesting. That's a good thing. I think it's good, really Pat's probably a better Will linebacker, but played good at Mike and I think it's good to have that versatility. I think the guys we have in this group here are really going to have that kind of versatility, too. So we're fine with that.

Q. Given the way the depth chart, with Bulaga leaving and having a couple of seniors. Will Donnal and Scherff have a shot?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see. With Bulaga really being the exception, Brian came in and played a lot as a freshman. But that's so uncommon. For us, if we're counting on that, then we're really screwed up. And if it happens, that's a good thing. But I think realistically, we're hopeful they can come in get their feet on the ground. If they can contribute a little bit, great. But I think more importantly a year from spring, hopefully they'll be right in the thick of things. And they're two guys we're real excited about, too. I think they've got great potential. So that's the good news, but I hate for any incoming player to feel like, boy, they've got to come in and save our football team. Hopefully we'll get some guys to make contributions. I think that will be the case.

But it's kind of like summer school. I just don't think you put that kind of pressure on a first-year guy and if it happens, beautiful. But if it doesn't, too, you know we're just trying to get their feet on the ground get them going in the right direction.

Q. Do you expect -- I know you've got

three safeties, I think. With the depth chart there, do you see any of those guys maybe jumping in?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's possible because we don't have a lot of depth right now. We feel great about our experience at both starting positions and they won't be out there again this spring. They both had offseason surgery. Like they did a year ago.

So when you guys come out to the scrimmage, April 17th, it's going to be the same old thing. Geez, don't look very good. Hopefully we'll look better when fall rolls around. But I think it's very possible. We're going to need some guys to get involved in the two deep, and we'll see what kind of competition we have this spring.

The guys that are healthy are going to have a great opportunity to get some quality work and show what they can do. And then we'll see what the young guys can do when they get here. But that is something that we're hoping maybe we can get a little bit of help there.

Q. Do you see or focus in the next recruiting class being more skilled position guys rather than offensive defensive line after loading up a little bit this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, maybe not as much with the defensive line, though. Although, we're graduating three pretty good players. We'll probably hit that pretty hard and the offensive line for sure we'll hit hard because again we're not real senior-laden next year but I think we need to keep building.

It's hard to play good football if you're not good up front on both sides of the football. So we're going to try to keep that as an emphasis. But I think we kind of hit the areas we need to hit and tight end is going to be important next year with Allen (Reisner) graduating. So we'll have our challenges, that's for sure.

Q. Are you guys seeing more interest coming off the Orange Bowl, have the phones been ringing, more tapes coming in, anything like that?

COACH FERENTZ: I can tell you the people are warm and fuzzy all the places I traveled and I think our assistants feel the same way. I was criss-crossing this past several weeks here. But everybody, every school I went into, the coaches and staff members, they took note of what we did, particularly our defensive football team. I've gotten a lot of great letters, not only in terms of winning

the football game and playing well, but how our guys conducted themselves.

I got a letter from a guy that played at Texas actually for Coach Royal. He delivered it to my house 317 East College Street. The letter came to me. I don't live at East College Street. I thought it was interesting. I opened the letter, it was from a guy that played at Texas. He was curious to watch the game only because he wanted to see what somebody would do with an option team; they were wishbone when he played. I appreciate that. I think people appreciated the way our guys played and the attitude they displayed on the field. We're hopeful that the good things that came out of the Orange Bowl victory will help in next year's recruiting class and years beyond.

Q. What took you to Cincinnati, because that's a different place, also DC, do you see setting up shop in Ohio?

COACH FERENTZ: Ohio has been good to us. There's an awful lot of people and football players there. And there are players that are familiar with the Big Ten. They're familiar with our weather in the Midwest in general. So I think that makes sense.

You know, we've dabbled in Cincinnati, not successfully. But we've dabbled there and we really feel good certainly about B.J. joining us. He's the young guy that we impressed with. And he's not unlike a lot of guys. Everybody at the school just loved him.

Brad Rogers comes to mind. I went into the school last year and his guidance counselor, the priest that runs the school, the athletic director, everybody couldn't say enough about Brad. And that's exactly who he is with us. He's just a guy that does things the way he's supposed to do and works hard. And so kind of the same thing with B.J. Everybody there really just kind of fell in love with him at the school. And he's done a lot of things I think to impress people. And we feel good about him coming with us.

Out East, we've tried unsuccessfully to recruit Gilman. My oldest son went to Gilman for two years. We've tried over the years to get a guy out of there. And we were finally able to get Coach Pojee's (phonetic) son, Jim, to come. Thrilled about that. And Anthony chose to come also.

Tremendous school and tremendous program. They've had great tradition of success.

And the math thing was a little bit of a surprise to me, surprised as anybody. Probably read the story. Marcus drove out. His mother doesn't drive we thought it killed our chances to get him. They drove out in August right when practice was getting started and drove to another Big Ten school. Headed home, you know however many times it took and a couple of weeks later he committed to us.

And then the rest of the story is he was a good football player. We really liked him. I fell in love with the guy when I met him and his mom, tremendous people. Then this year he really had a good year and it's a little bit like Hampton had a great game against Glenville. It caught my eye a couple of years back. Marcus had a great game against Gilman. I forget how many he ran for. I've got a friend who scouts in the NFL for a profession. He happened to be at the game. He called and left me a voice mail. He said, boy, I saw that guy committed to you, he's a really good player. You guys will probably lose him now and that was it. Good friend of mine. My good friend. I'm not going to name him right now. But so I was in the tank on that a little bit. But Marcus has stuck with us and we're really excited about him.

Q. You've talked in the past about getting your type of guys. Does this class fit that mold and what exactly does that mean?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. And I think that's why I feel pretty good about this whole year and what it means -- there's certain things that we think are important in football players, and guys are going to -- it's a tough tour of duty to go to a Big Ten school and get a diploma. That's not easy in itself to play in a program that wants to compete at a high level. Nothing easy about that. And you know our players are very, very visible in our community, which I think is a great thing. But with that comes a lot of responsibility.

So we're looking for guys that are going to welcome those three challenges. And it's all projection. That's one thing about recruiting rankings, like preseason rankings, it's all subjective. They're all projections and the proof's in the pudding and we'll know more in three, four years. I think that would be an interesting study. To go back. I know they rank classes, but they ought to go back and maybe somebody's already doing this look at teams when they play each other and take the cumulative merits that guys have, recruiting merits, and see how they all compare and what really happens with the results on the

field, because that's all that counts at the end of the day.

But that's what we're looking for. We've had guys that I think have been recognized that have done very well. We've had a lot of two star guys. I talked about them last year. Guys like Fletcher, Shonn Greene. Godfrey was a two-star guy, started as a rookie in the NFL. Karl Klug. I just mentioned him. So we just needle guys who are going to come in here and really work hard and buy into what we're trying to get accomplished.

I wish we had a better chart but that's what we do.

Q. Talk about St. Louis again. You guys have -- you have a pipeline, Hazelwood?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's North County. Players talk to each other. One thing I noticed here in the '80s, we had a lot of players from New Jersey. Bernie was a tremendous recruiter throughout his entire career. I remember asking Bernie about that. He told me -- this was at a young age -- but he says players sell players and I think there's a lot of truth in that.

The fact that guys came out here had good experience, good quality experience in all the areas I talked about. That's important.

And my son sees Andrew Donnal frequently. He comes down every Monday, every Monday gives him the Hawkeye, Go Hawks, one of those shots. When a guy like Andre Tippett comes from Newark, New Jersey, he probably wondered where the heck am I when he got here in 1980. Now 30 years later this is one of the great experiences of his lifetime, and that's what you're looking for.

So that stuff's all good, and that's a neat thing. So if you can get people to have a good experience, I think that certainly helps you regionally in a recruiting area. No question about that. Because players, there's a lot of recruit talk that goes out there, but I believe players ultimately believe players more than they believe anybody, and that's a good source of information for recruits.

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Coach Ferentz - 2 03 10