

September 6, 2014



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Certainly we're thrilled to get the victory today. Ball State came in, and certainly they did what they had to do. They played well, they played hard, and they played a lot cleaner than we did. And credit to them. They were very well prepared, played a good game.

I'm just really pleased that our guys hung in there. They fought, and like last week, they responded in some difficult circumstances and got it done in the fourth quarter.

So hopefully, this is a window that we'll look back to and say it was a really good day of learning for us. We'll see how it shapes out here, but really happy to get the win.

Q. What encouraged the offense on that deep drive? Just seemed like everything was clicking.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know. Both drives at the end fourth quarter, we played better football. We were struggling to get anything going, any rhythm offensively, pretty much through three quarters.

It wasn't any one area. There were just a lot of mistakes, and it's tough to play good offense if you don't have guys playing cohesively and playing together and playing good fundamental football.

Q. Did your heart go up a little bit when Brandon went down?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely. A little bit.

Q. Take me through that anxious few minutes.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: That was a great hustle play on his part. That was the good

news. We had one of those up in Michigan State a couple of years ago, more than a couple of years ago, a decade ago.

It was a great effort play on his part. He was just trying to help us out after a turnover. When he stayed down, that's not a good feeling obviously.

The good news is his knee was stable when they examined it. He's a really tough minded guy. For him to come back and do what he did is a positive. Also Ike Boettger jumped in there and did a nice job. Came out of the bullpen, and seemed like he held his own out there.

Q. Could you point to any specific thing in the last five minutes that turned them on?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I really can't, other than we had no choice. Both those possessions, we had to take it and get at least a touchdown and obviously preferably get another touchdown. The guys just rallied.

Certainly the protection was good. It starts up front. Jake did a good job of engineering things. He managed everything very, very well. Good communication, and the receivers did a good job of working to get open and playing smart, and that includes our backs too. Damon came out of the backfield.

It was well executed. I just said on the radio, I'm pretty sure we couldn't have done it a year ago, and I don't think we would have two years ago either, safe to say. Hopefully, that's a positive we'll take out of the game. That and staying in there and never giving up.

Q. Could you almost sense the offense didn't gel with a quarterback controversy brewing?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: That was the last thing on my mind. In fact, I hadn't thought about it until you just brought it up. There were a

lot of other things I was thinking about.

Q. He was very patient on those last couple of drives. How hard is that to do, and how important was it to maintain that?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I think the tougher drive was the first one because clock was a huge factor. The second one, we got the ball back with plenty of time. So it wasn't quite as pressing. But that first one, we didn't have time to fool around. We needed to get down there and go. He still did a good job of pulling it down when he had to and felt like he could get a first down to stop the clock.

He's a heady player, and he's got experience now too, as opposed to last year. That's certainly a positive for us.

Q. Jake stood in and took some shots today.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: He did.

Q. How much was he really able to throw in rhythm today?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: Not enough. We had some near misses too in the first three quarters that might have helped out. That's the story of the day. We didn't make the plays. They did. It's a credit to them.

Q. You threw the ball 55 times today too. I can't imagine that's by design.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It isn't. It's a by-product of where we're at and the way we were playing. We were really fortunate to be down by the score we were down at that point based on what we had done. The defense is who kept us in it and gave us a chance to be in there.

I think about the last time we turned it over down in there and held them to a field goal.

It seemed like last week we did some things that weren't so good, but I thought our defense responded and gave us a chance to get back in the ball game. That certainly was the case today.

Q. Is there a problem with your running game? You seem to have really gone away from it.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: It just didn't look good. Part of it was it appeared to me, at least from the sidelines, they weren't going to let us run the ball the way we want to.

It was a tough game to scout because they have a new defensive coordinator. So we went back and looked at film from him at Georgetown and combined that with what they did last year.

Probably the biggest thing -- I don't think there was anything that's major league different other than they amped the blitz percentage. They came at us pretty hard a lot of the time. That's something to fix, the run game.

They had an excellent game plan. They did a really good job. We didn't establish anything really in that run game, especially in the first half. We're going to really have to look hard at that, but I thought we adjusted a little bit better in the third quarter.

Q. Where does the kicking game go from here? Is Ellis the guy?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We'll just keep working. I just said this on the radio. Obviously, it wasn't a good day for either placekicker. Marshall's doing a great job on kickoffs. I was more despondent back in April because we had 15 days of practice and there wasn't much to be encouraged about. I thought in August we practiced well at that position, and it hasn't showed up yet.

But there's nothing we can do other than just keep working at it. My point is I've seen those guys do good things in practice. I think they're quality guys. So we've just got to stay with them.

It's kind of like Jonathan Parker. He was involved in a couple of awful plays, but he's practiced really well too. Sometimes you get a young guy that hasn't played and you've got to live with that. I'm not concerned about it just because he's got a body of work right now that's really been impressive.

Q. Coach, had it come down to it, just to follow-up, that final drive came down to the fourth down, if you had to send a kicker out, who would that kicker have been?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure confident is a word I'd choose right now, based on today, just this last three hours. But had we had to send somebody out there -- and I'm not sure who it would have been -- we would have been confident they'd make it and support them all the way obviously.

It was one of those situations we were hoping it didn't come down to, but I'm an optimist. I

like to think it would have worked out.

Q. That 84 offense is quite interesting.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We needed all 84 of them too -- other than the last one or two. There again, the defense did a great job of getting the ball back at the end there.

Q. Your defense seemed to make those good strikes in week one and week two in the run game, and really ten points wasn't really on them at all.

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: The first series didn't feel good, just the way we were playing. Didn't hurt us other than field position change a little bit. Felt like we were feeling them out a little bit. After that, I thought we played pretty well. Although there were a lot of plays, missed tackles and leverage to the ball that are going to be correctable tomorrow and we're going to have to start nailing down because those matters of feeding yards, can't really start that up, especially in close games.

We'll have to do a little bit better there, but a lot of that is inexperience, hopefully, this game experience will help the guys.

Q. Two very tough games to start the season, but it's two wins. Confidence-wise, what does it do for the guys?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: The best thing, again -- and I said that last week -- I thought the team responded in tough circumstances, and I thought that was the case again today.

Again, it was kind of different segments, but outside of our field goals, the special teams played pretty well. The defense gave us a chance to stay alive, and then obviously the offense rallied there in the fourth quarter.

So hopefully, we can all look back and say, hey, we learned something about ourselves today. We're all set to look back and say there's a lot to clean up here. We have ten tough games ahead of us, and there's going to be more of the same each and every week. So we have to maximize our opportunities a little bit better.

Q. What was your thought process on using Boettger in that series? What did he show you?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: We never got to it last week. It's something we said we're going to do. Then we get into the game, and when do you do it? We basically thought coming into the game,

we'd do second and third series with him and just see where it took us. That's kind of about it.

Q. Is Weisman injured?

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: He's fine.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH KIRK FERENTZ: No, I think it ties in with the run game part of it. We're going to have to better figure this out because clearly we're not running the ball as effectively as we need to. It's something we have to revisit tomorrow and think about between now and next Tuesday before we start practicing again.

Thank you.

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