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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: This past weekend was a tough loss for our football team, and like any other week, win, lose or draw we'll move on and start that process today.

Injury-wise, Stanzi definitely will not play. He's still pretty swollen and not moving around, so he will not play.

The only other guy really significant right now is Jeremiah Hunter. We'll see how the week goes. He will not practice today. He'll work out a little bit and see how it progresses as we go along.

Captains are the same as they've been. They are Angerer, Edds, Moeaki and Stanzi.

Minnesota, is coming into town. I expect it to be another tough conference game. They're a well-coached football team. Defensively the thing that jumps out at you is their experience level. They've got a lot of guys with starting experience. They've got nine seniors and two juniors in their starting lineup. They've been around the block. They know what to do, they're talented and they do a nice job. That's going to be a challenge for us offensively.

I think they've improved from a year ago up front, which was one of the things on their menu list.

Tight end is playing very well for them. Weber has been a very good quarterback for several years. Seems like he's a senior, but he's still only a junior. Then they come in with Gray, who's a good change-up pitcher for them, very talented guy, dangerous guy. We're impressed with their running backs.

Their receiving corps took a hit. One of the best players in our conference, Decker, got hurt a couple weeks back, and they've lost him for

the season. Tremendous football player and a veteran player.

The thing they have now is that they've got a lot of young guys out there. They're all very talented. They're very explosive, very athletic. You've seen them in the kicking game do some good things. They're a very talented group there.

In the kicking game, the returner has really impressed us. We had a terrible time last year against their kick return team. Their punt return team is doing a good job this year, too; they're leading the conference. They've got a good football team, and it's going to be a tough conference game, like I said.

The last thing is we have 17 seniors who are going to play their last football game in Kinnick this year, next to last in their career. That's certainly significant. We look forward to them being honored before the kickoff. I can't say enough about the job they've done on the field, off the field, in a lot of different ways. Just a tremendous group, and hopefully Saturday can be a good day for those guys.

Q. How is Brandon Wegher?

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully he'll be fine. I was hoping he'd be fine Saturday, too, but he didn't make it.

Q. When you got a chance to look back at the tape, how did you assess James Vandenberg's performance?

COACH FERENTZ: He played well. I felt that way Saturday, I feel the same now. He did a lot of good things. He certainly gave us a chance to win the football game. I thought he really played well in a very tough circumstance.

Q. When you look back at last year's game against Minnesota and everything was clicking for you, especially in the second half, do you ever think about the future when you're

up 38, 45, all the way up, to nothing, or last year was that just keep going?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not quite following the question.

Q. It was the biggest margin of victory in school history.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it just happened. It was one of those games, totally an aberration. I'm still not sure how it happened. I wasn't sure how it happened that night. We were playing well and things just started rolling. I sure didn't see that coming.

We haven't had too many of those games, so it was just one of those things that happens. But they don't happen often, that's for sure, especially in conference play. I don't think it's reflective of probably either team quite frankly. I really don't think it is.

Q. Do you use that as motivation a little bit?

COACH FERENTZ: That's their choice. That's their choice, and I guess that's what you do. You know, to me it was a flukish thing that happened. We haven't had many games like that. Sometimes they happen, but it wasn't like -- I don't think it was reflective of the teams. They were a good football team last year.

Q. You guys were so good in turnover margin throughout the first eight games of the season and have gone completely the opposite way the last three games. How do you reverse that trend again?

COACH FERENTZ: Last week's game was a little different, but the two prior games were certainly a concern. First game where we had problems, I don't want to say it was a miracle that we dug out of that hole, but close to. And the second week we weren't good enough to overcome the trouble that we caused ourselves.

When you get into conference play, any game, especially in conference play, turnovers are a statistic that really is typically significant. It played a major factor in our loss two weeks ago. Probably not as big a factor this past week, but Ohio State didn't turn it over, so they gave themselves a chance. They played a real clean game.

Q. Do you do anything, though, to reemphasize that?

COACH FERENTZ: We coach it every week, both takeaways and ball security. There are a lot of factors that go into it, experience, decision-making, wind maybe a little bit going back to Indiana, all those things combined. But certainly if we're going to get back on track, we're going to have to do a better job there. Our chances of winning this week and any week will be better if we do a better job in that regard. I liked it prior to the Indiana game the way we were going. We were up at the top of the league like you mentioned.

Q. You guys are like second in the nation gathering interceptions; you're also second in nation giving up interceptions. For a coach like you that's almost got to be maddening I imagine?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not the first part. I like that part. A coach like me likes that. There's probably no coach that wants to turn it over, myself included.

Q. Is that the nature of the game? Has the game just gotten, more teams throwing it, more teams risking more on offense?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I haven't done a study on that one. I think we're just probably playing a little more opportunistic. I really can't explain the last two years why we've done a better job of takeaways, but we have, and that's a good thing. It probably means we're a little bit more athletic, maybe a little more aggressive. Offensively we were doing great until two and a half weeks ago, three weeks ago, so we've got to get back on track there.

Q. You've said all year when we were asking questions about the BCS and all that sort of stuff, you said we'll likely be at the end of the year where we deserve to be. But with a win on Saturday, you'll probably be in the top 14 and in the mix for an outright spot. Is there anything you can do or willing to do to sort of politick or defend and maybe get this team the best bowl they can get?

COACH FERENTZ: With a win on Saturday we'll be 10 and 2, with a loss we'll be 9 and 3, and we'll go from there. It really doesn't matter right now. I'm not even thinking about it, and I hope nobody else is in our camp, because it doesn't matter. That's somebody else's job.

Q. I know you have a 24-hour rule. Looking back on the way things ended in hindsight is always easy. Would you do anything differently Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: No.

Q. Guys say that about the way your freshman James Vandenberg played, people on the outside might have been surprised that a red-shirt freshman could go into a big situation and play well. You guys never seem surprised, the players never seemed surprised. Talk about James' makeup mentally because that's a big stage to come in and start your first game.

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it was tough for all of our players, not just him. I thought the whole team handled it well. We had five challenging road games this year, and I'm not disappointed with anything we've done in the five road games. I think the guys have handled it well.

Probably doesn't come much tougher than Ohio State. You could rank a couple other places there with it. And then you add to the degree of difficulty with a fairly inexperienced quarterback.

To me what it showed Saturday is that James has been doing his homework. He's been really attentive. He's been running our offense basically since last December. He got a lot of work in December and then certainly through spring practice. He's a quick learner. He's prepared well, and I think he showed he's got a lot of poise.

But you never know until you see a guy in game conditions, and certainly I don't think it was fair for anybody to judge him on what happened two weeks ago, mainly because he got thrown in cold, and unfortunately hadn't had the luxury of throwing 20, 30 balls during the course of the year this year. I think that would have made a huge difference. And that's probably what we saw on Saturday.

Now the next step is what do you do week two, and we'll find that out this week. We've got a lot of confidence in him, just like we had confidence when Robinson jumped in there, Wegher jumped in there. We've had a lot of guys step in, Reiff, Joe Conklin, a lot of guys have stepped in and done some good things for us.

That's what you hope happens. But again, I acknowledge the fact it is tough for a quarterback, there's no doubt about that. It's a real credit to James what he did last week getting ready.

Q. Is there a difference in his arm strength?

COACH FERENTZ: Left one or right one? He throws the ball well. You guys are over-thinking all this crap too much. He can throw the football; he's a quarterback. He can put some zip on it. He made some impressive throws. I'm impressed with his throwing. We've seen him throw.

And I'm impressed with the fact that he took a couple shots in the head and -- that's the stuff you don't let guys do in practice. We can't simulate 110,000 people and we're not going to let guys come in and whack him, either, during most conditions. That's the stuff that you really find out about a guy. Yes, he clearly can throw the football, and I think he showed that in high school even, as skinny as he was. But he can throw the football.

I thought he just showed a lot of mental and physical toughness. Quarterbacks better have that no matter what your style of offense is.

Q. Did Ricky Stanzi help much during the course of the game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, outside of last Monday, he was with him all week long. The three of these guys, they're like the three amigos. They're together all the time. I've said that before, really since last spring ball, this has been a good group. You go on the field, all three of these guys like football, they're kind of football junkies, they've got good personalities, they work with each other well, and I think Rick felt like his role last week was to really be with him, at his side at all times. You saw them together an awful lot. So it was good to see.

That's what you hope you have on a team, and those three guys in particular really have a nice chemistry. It's good when you have players that like each other like that. It's really a good deal.

Q. Is there still a sense in this building that there's a chunk of the Big Ten Championship still on the line out there?

COACH FERENTZ: We know it's out there, but we know it's not in our hands. I encourage the guys not to think about that or worry about that. That's wasted energy right now. In '81 it ended up coming our way that way, but it's a lot more productive for us right now just to worry

about this game because it's going to be a tough conference game, and that's what's important.

I'll go back to that point, too. I want to really complement John Wienke. I think John Wienke is a heck of a player, too. I probably shouldn't be saying this with our recruiting down the road, but we've really got a lot of good feelings about him, too. Right now he just happens to be a slot below James. Again, all three of those guys, he really prepared well last week, too; he's right in there with those guys.

Q. Sunday night I was watching one of your mentors. Belichick does kind of the opposite of what you did Saturday night; he takes a gamble. How long does it take for a coach to say, hey, I made my decision and you guys put it out of your minds?

COACH FERENTZ: It was out of my mind after the game until somebody brought it up, and I think I read about it in the paper, too, somewhere. I guess maybe I had a little tougher time releasing those two interception returns that took place in the second half. Those are more prominent in my thoughts than some other people's.

What I didn't want to do is we had played our tails off for 59 minutes. To me it was better to get to middle ground for our football team at that point. I figured both teams starting out even might be a better way, unless we had done something there, punt return, shanked punt, snuck a run in on them on that first play.

I just didn't like the odds of 52 seconds or whatever it was and 70 yards. Again, I had two plays kind of fixated in my mind. I didn't want to -- that No. 90 got down that field pretty quick with the ball in his arms. I guess I've got to think about those things, too.

If we had Tom Brady I'd probably be considering the other way. I thought it was a great call Sunday night. I did get to see it, and I thought it was a great call.

Q. Did Daniel's Murray's 22-yard miss factor there, too?

COACH FERENTZ: Possibly. I think about a lot of things.

Q. When do you start that thinking process?

COACH FERENTZ: It's going on during the game. Besides doing those crossword puzzles I like to work on, but I do think about the game a little bit during the game, too.

Q. Last year King and Kroul were the two big senior leaders on the defense, and this year it looks like Edds and Angerer have taken that role. Can you talk about your linebacking tandem of seniors and what they've brought and the specialness of having them play their last game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, that's a good story line, both those guys, because they're basically opposites almost in every regard. If you look at the history of their careers, A.J.'s has been very, very smooth. He's probably going after Gary Barta's job as soon as he gets out of football. Fortunately he wants to go into administration, not coaching, or maybe he'll be president of a bank or something like that. That's what he looks like.

Pat might be after someone else's job, WWA or whatever they call that stuff. So a little different personality-wise.

A.J. has had really a pretty smooth course, and I'm not minimizing his career, but he came in and was the No. 2 guy right away and played special teams and a three-year starter and has just done a great, great job. Pat has come a tougher road. Pat's road has not been fun at all times, and that's pretty well documented. Everybody did that story last year, and it's a great story. At the end of the day, both guys have really emerged as great leaders, and the difference probably playing-wise is A.J. is playing out there at a position that's more -- it's so key to our defense, yet it's not as pronounced because statistically that's just how it works out.

But we can't play good defense without somebody in that position playing great. LeVar Woods comes to mind right away. And then Pat is right in the hub of things where he's got to do an awful lot, and it fits his personality and demeanor very, very well.

So they're very different stories but great stories. That's the neat thing about football; we get 17 good stories out of the senior class, and they're all different in their own ways. But they're all the same, too. It's just a nice deal.

Q. With those two guys do you see any correlation maybe to a Greenway and Hodge from two years ago or anything?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it's probably a little different there, mainly because of the position. A.J. plays -- it's kind of a quiet position, I guess,

statistically, whereas Greenway and Hodge are both in the middle of things all the time. So a little bit different there.

Q. Your best teams have played their best football in November. How do you feel about the way this team is playing?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're playing good football. I think we've played good football all season long. You know, I don't judge everything on wins and losses. I know the public does, and I know you get hired and fired by that. But I evaluate on performance, and I think our guys have been playing pretty good. I think we're playing strong in November, and we're going to have to this week because it's going to be a tough conference game again.

Q. What jumps to mind when you think about the senior class as a whole?

COACH FERENTZ: I just think they've done a great job. I go back to last year. I've really enjoyed these last two years. We've had two groups that have just been fun to be around. The seniors did a great job last year with the guys underneath them helping out. I think those guys as they have moved up the chain have carried it on. How they carry themselves around this building, in their workouts, they do a lot of working out during the course of the year, what they're doing academically, just in social settings, et cetera, how they travel, the way people at visiting hotels, people that fly us around or bus us around, the feedback you get, all those things are important. They all go into my evaluation, and I can't say enough about the senior class, what they've done. They've just done a great job.

Q. What changed since '06? That was kind of a low point for you. What changed to make these last two years so enjoyable?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot of hard work and a lot of collective effort. But it's all about the players. I mean, the players have -- I keep calling it a virus or whatever. whatever we went through, I think we're back on the track we want to be on. Have we won every game, no; but we've been competing hard and playing hard and working hard together. On the field I'd include the '07 group, too. We were moving in the right direction. That's where it all started.

To me it's all about attitude more than anything else, and whatever reason I think we're back on the path we want to be on.



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Q. In the numbers game over a period of time, you've had a chance now to build. The numbers are good for seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen, too, continuing to get continuity.

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, it's never going to be where you want it to be, but we've got something going there. You have so many things that vary in, injuries, projections that don't work out, those types of things, personal reasons, players go home or stay home, transfer, et cetera. So those things always keep it -- there are always variables, and we're always going to have more variables than some other programs probably. That's just the nature of things.

But I think the guys have been doing a good job, I really do, and I'm excited about the way things are going.

Q. It's not like you got that balance overnight.

COACH FERENTZ: No, we've been here long enough, you hope you have some stability. That being said every program has ups and downs and peaks and valleys. It's part of what we do and what have you. It helps to have a stable staff. We've got that. I think we all have a pretty good working relationship, and that's a good thing.

Q. When you put Adam Robinson on Saturday, did you see 20 carries?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I mean, I was hoping, but it's a little bit like James Vandenberg. Adam looked okay in practice last week, and the good news is nothing escalated after he worked -- the volume went up a little bit, but we certainly weren't going to tackle him. And Ohio State is pretty good at tackling, and this group will tackle, too. So you just never know. That was the variable. But he miraculously held up. He's a real tough-minded guy.

Q. What does it say about him?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, no ankle sprains are the same; injuries are all different. But one thing I really know about Adam, if he can go, he's going to go. He's one of those, I call them feel-good players. You're around the guy, you feel good. He's always got a positive attitude, he's always hustling, and he truly enjoys the game, and he enjoys his teammates. I saw a clip on the

highlights, I think it was after Derrell's run, they showed him down on the bench. You guys have seen him with Wegher when Wegher scores. This guy is just the real deal. Adam is one of the better stories we've had, and that's one of the reasons we've won nine games.

Q. His running. Who would you compare him with?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's pretty good. I don't know who to compare him to, but he's pretty good. He's really efficient, effective, and that group we played the other day, that's a tough group to get runs against. It's hard to get positive runs, and he had a handful of them, so that was impressive.

Q. With all the focus outside of the program on the one decision at the end of the Ohio State game, that's one of how many decisions that you make as a head coach in a game?

COACH FERENTZ: Four or five. I make four or five. But that's just the way it goes. There was two ways to play the situation. We played it one way. And if we had won in overtime it would have been a non-issue. When you lose games, everybody has got to find a reason to -- that's just how it goes. That's the country we live in. That's the world we live in.

Q. But it's one of 100 decisions?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I've never counted them. But that's a big one, obviously. But I didn't think it was that big at the time. Again, I was focused on something that I thought was significant.

Q. What about Weber. Talk about him losing his top receiver, and how has he adjusted and how has it maybe affected him? He's still putting up numbers.

COACH FERENTZ: He's putting up numbers. It didn't seem to hurt him in that Michigan State game at all. The guy is a veteran player. I really thought he was a senior going into this year. So it's interesting. But he's starting three years, so that means the guy can throw the football. He's really good.

Anytime you lose a great player, and Decker is a great player, he's one of the better guy in our conference, that influences everybody. But we're certainly not relaxing because the only thing they are right now outside is inexperienced, but

they're very talented, very athletic. They've done a good job recruiting, and as I said, we saw Stoudemire last year return those punts, what he can do. They've got three or four guys that are really very, very talented, very explosive.

Q. Along those lines, you touched on Gray kind of being a change-of-pace quarterback. What impresses you most about him when you watch him on film?

COACH FERENTZ: Right now with him it's more athleticism than total quarterback package, but that will be something that expands and develops. He's a big guy, can run well. And he can throw it, too. But they're not going to put him back there and throw it 25 times with him. He's not at that point yet, but he will be soon, I'm sure.

Q. Bruce Davis made his first appearance on the two deep, but he's made a lot of contributions on special teams. How does his progress been?

COACH FERENTZ: Really good, and he's illustrative of how our program works probably. Bruce is -- I think we beat Ball State to get him. And he was on our kickoff team last year, but statistically I don't think he's showing up right now. He's leading our team on tackles on kickoff and just really has been a catalyst on that team. So he went from being a guy last year who was out there doing his job to becoming a catalyst.

I think we're seeing the same thing as a linebacker; he's starting to be a contender now, whereas a year ago he was just a guy filling out a spot on the third team.

He's really made progress, and I could say the same about Troy and Tarp, too. I think all three of those guys have done a nice job on special teams growing. They're more confident now. Bruce was a linebacker in high school; Jeff and Troy were both different positions, free safety, quarterback, athlete.

So all those guys are growing. It's important because we're graduating two good seniors, so those guys will be in the mix next year.

But it's fun to watch Bruce. He's maturing, and he's maturing off the field, too. He's a lot more serious about things, and that's good to see.

Q. You hear a lot from the national media about the Big Ten not being a very good

conference, but here at the end of the season when a team's ranking actually means something, four teams ranked in the top 20. Is there a case to be made now that the Big Ten might be better than a lot of people say it is?

COACH FERENTZ: I'll just go back to my canned speech. I think perception gets exaggerated. I'll point out the Ohio State-Texas game. I think we all agree Texas had a great team last year. The Ohio State-Texas game was a great game, and I'd say the same thing about Missouri and Northwestern in the Bowl game, and everybody was touting Missouri, for good reason; they had an excellent football team, a great season. They were in, I think, the Big 12 championship a year ago playing Oklahoma. And Northwestern played a heck of a football game.

So I think, again, it's easy just to start throwing stuff out there. The statistics and films don't always back that up. I think that's my feeling. It all kind of goes around.

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