

September 23, 2014



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Just started out, as always, captains are the same four guys. Louis Trinca-Pasat, Quinton Alston, Brandon Scherff and Mark Weisman will be the captains. We seem to be locked in there. Injury-wise, I don't think Macon Plewa will be able to go again, so we'll keep him out one more time. And Jake Rudock will come up as day-to-day, so we'll see how that goes as we move along. I'm going to hold him out of interviews today, too. He's coming from class. We'll let him get treatment, and I would imagine all the questions center around one thing, so we'll spare him that detail today.

Good to get the win, obviously, and now we've got to move on to Purdue. Travel on the road here for two in a row, and get ready for a team that's, from my vantage point, much improved. It's going to be a big challenge for us. They've got a team that looks a lot more comfortable now. They've got second year with the coaching staff, so I think there is a bigger comfort level there.

Quarterback's a second year player now, so he's got experience. Just to be improved in every facet, and one thing of note, both kickoff and punt returners are really dangerous players. Punt returners got, I think, a really big average right now. He's 20-plus a return, and that's without having an 80-yarder in there, so that's pretty impressive. Their kick return guys are both extremely fast, as are the running backs.

So both running backs are back there and they're dangerous guys and one guy is extremely fast. So we have our work cut out on all three levels, so we'll go back to work today.

Q. Last year Jake Rudock had dealt with some knee stuff for three games. But this wasn't that, right?

COACH FERENTZ: Correct. I didn't say that. It's all soft tissue right now. We got that tested yesterday. It's a couple different spots, but the good news is there is nothing torn or really bad.

Q. Is there a specific date this week that he would have to be on the field to be able to play? Is it different for quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll play it day by day and see what it looks like. I don't expect he'll be with the trainers today. We'll move him around, see how he feels and go from there. The good news is he feels better this morning than he did yesterday, and getting the test results back was a real positive.

Q. Where do you stand, Coach, on injuries? Can a guy lose his starting spot to an injury? Do you have a set rule?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there is no set rule. Some players are really hard. It's going to be tough to beat Scherff out and it was kind of that way coming in. If anybody can do it, if he wasn't one of our five best linemen, he wouldn't be out there playing. So we'll just play it by ear. The good news I said Saturday and I really mean this, we have two guys we have a lot of confidence in. Maybe I've been around that situation before. It just doesn't pop out off the top of my head. But maybe in '81, Pete Gales and Gordie Bohannon were both really capable. But, you know, we'll just play it by ear. The good news is, at least, we're not going way into the bullpen here to come up with something.

Q. If Jake can't go Sunday, Wiegers would be your number two I would assume. A guy you'd like to red-shirt?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a little different topic there now.

Q. How's his progression coming?

COACH FERENTZ: I really don't know. He's been on the scout team most of the time. The one thing I'm pretty confident, and I said two months ago, he can take a snap from our centers now. That was a real issue in August. That's a big step. I still remember to this day I'm pretty sure it was 1977. I remember Pitt losing to Notre Dame. Literally if they could have run quarterback sneaks to finish the game, they would have won the game. They had some center exchange problems, and it was that kind of situation, about so that's not a good deal. So we'll learn more about Tyler this week, for sure today.

Q. You've gone through it with the injury thing a little bit. Part of coming back is being able to perform at the same level. Does that help you or give you some sort of peace of mind in terms of Jake's dealt with pain before and you've seen how he's had to respond on the field?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. First of all, the medical staff will not clear anybody that's at risk, so we're not going to do that with any player. The second part of the equation is can they play effectively? We didn't know that about Brandon and Drew a couple weeks ago. But they were able to demonstrate that they could do it.

Yeah, you don't want to put a player out there where they're not going to be able to perform and look representative of the kind of players they are. That's just not fair to anybody. The team or the players individually. The good news right now is it's really more about what we see than it is anything else at this point.

Q. Ironically, last time you went to Pittsburgh you had a situation where you were playing two guys and went on a gut feeling and went with Christensen as I recall in the second half. Is this totally different because it's an injury involved?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we didn't have a choice Saturday. Jake could have gone in, but couldn't move. It wouldn't have been fair to him or anybody else. What we would have done after that, that would have been interesting. The thought entered my mind at halftime, but didn't share it with anybody else, and fortunately it never

came up. We have a week now to prepare if that ends up being the case if Jake can't play.

Q. It seemed like Jake stayed engaged and stayed really with C.J. in helping him with an injury and everything else on his mind. How does he pull that out? Is that just the kind of guy he is?

COACH FERENTZ: You guys have been around him. This guy is not your average player. This is an exceptional young man going back to his organic chemistry test last year and all that stuff. Jake is just really wired the way you would want a player to be wired, any player, especially a quarterback. But it was really the same thing last week. I'll go back. Last week you had Lomax, Terlouw and Gair trying to help him get ready. And I remember Stanzi when he went down in '09, he's up here after surgery the same night with VandeBerg trying to get him ready. When you have good people on your team, that's what I think -- I don't want to say it's a tradition here. But we've been fortunate and we have high character guys and they're all about the team. They're not worried about their own little deals.

Q. What is C.J.'s best attribute? What is the thing that you put into that?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not good at that game, I guess. He's a good player. I feel the same way about Jake. They're different guys totally. Their personalities are different, they look different, just about go right down the row. But that's the neat thing about football. You've got a lot of diverse backgrounds, personalities, ages, all that stuff. But it's about they both share a real common bond in terms of they're here to help the team be a better football team, and they're great teammates with each other and that is certainly something you would expect or hope for.

It doesn't always work that way, especially at the quarterback position. You can have some interesting chemistry sometimes with the group and all that kind of stuff. But we've been pretty lucky and had a good run of guys that are thinking the right way.

Q. Were you surprised with how efficient Beathard seemed to be in that game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. If you guys had seen Thursday practice the answer would be yes, I was surprised. I was

underwhelmed with what I saw Thursday. But Tuesday and Wednesday were pretty good. That's kind of like our whole team, the consistency factor. But C.J.'s a really good quarterback, and I don't think I would be surprised by anything he did or Jake. I think both of them are capable of playing really well. I thought Jake played a good first half.

I've read a couple things coming home that night. I have a little technology, that I phone and stuff so I get to read scores. But if we catch that one ball and he got a turnover credited to his count instead of a big completion, his numbers look pretty good too. So again, I think we have two pretty good players.

Q. C.J. has a big arm and guys with big arms like to use it when they can. What's his progress been like?

COACH FERENTZ: I think good. Rudock threw it well too. It was a pretty deep ball. I think both the guys can throw. Their styles are different. They both can make the throws they need to make. Their leadership styles are different too, but they're both effective. Again, I feel pretty good. I'm no quarterback expert. I just know when I feel good about guys and when I don't. I feel really good about both of these players.

Q. How has C.J.'s life changed? If he's installed as a starter for the week today, how much more into it is he?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope not at all. Although I read a quote of one of our other back-up players how he amped it up last week, which will be a message to the team today. It's a good idea to amp it up all the time because you just never know. Coincidentally the Sam Brownlee story was featured in the press -- there is a publication they circulate in the press box, and his is a great story. I know when he sat in this room in August that year, he had no idea what was going to happen. How could he? Next thing you know he's in there playing against Ohio State and making A.J. Hawk miss on his best run, career run.

So that's just a good reminder that you never know what's going to happen. You like to think that everybody in the two-deep is preparing. Guys are going to be traveling or preparing the way a starter is, you know? That's ideal thinking. It doesn't always work that way, but a good reminder why it's important.

Q. I don't know if deserved is the right word, but do you think C.J. has earned more playing time?

COACH FERENTZ: I feel good about both guys. Most of those axioms are true and everybody loves the number two guy, and I do too. I'm glad he's on our team. I look at them both as starters just like I look at Mike Hardy as a starter. We can only start three ends on defense and right now it's Meier and Drew, but I consider Mike Hardy to be a starter. He really plays good football for us when he's in there, and that's rare when you have guys that can do that, but that is another position where at least we have three guys that can go in there and play at a really confident level.

Q. What was Beathard showing you Thursday that was not up to your standards?

COACH FERENTZ: He just wasn't sharp. He wasn't sharp, and that's not typical for him. So it's a little more prominent when a quarterback is like that because everybody notices what quarterbacks do. Practice is the same way. He just wasn't as sharp with his on target accuracy. That's not to suggest Jake's perfect every day either. We all have our ups and downs.

Q. Can you describe maybe the amount of man hours and work that goes into deciding who starts and why?

COACH FERENTZ: A year ago is really when the decision got made. We had to make one. At that point it's like every player on our team. Everybody's got a lot going. You put the little things in the plus column, you put them in the minus column and you just judge everything, but we evaluate everything. Not only practice, but everything that goes into it. At that position you want guys that are really dependable and you can trust because they've got a lot of responsibility.

But the good news is we found out about Jake last year. I think we found out early that he's a guy that can play at a really high level and we can win with, and due to the injury to Jake, we found the same thing out about C.J.

So, again, it's a really unusual situation, but we felt pretty good about both guys coming out of the year last year. The good news is now that we have them both healthy, and we have a really good situation right now. We don't. As of today, we're not in the best of situations, but hopefully it will get better as the week goes on.

Q. Is Koehn going to be instructed to kick it out of the endzone to avoid a pretty good return?

COACH FERENTZ: If we can kick it out, we'll do that. The only downside is it's going to be a little windy over there. I don't predict much, but I'll predict that because that's a factor. Marshall's done a wonderful job. That's a stat that goes unnoticed by a lot of folks, but I really appreciate it. All of us do. It's nice to know you don't have that threat. But my guess is at some point this week we're going to have to cover and make sure our coverage team hasn't gotten lulled to sleep because Marshall's done a great job.

Q. You mentioned leadership a moment ago. On the sidelines, did you sense any difference in the way the rest of the offensive players on the field interacted with or reacted to Jake versus C.J. when C.J. wasn't in?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm sure you've already asked our guys and will do so again today. But I think our players, they're like coaches, there is a lot of fuel involved in anything you do in athletics and I think confidence gets earned through performance and through what you do. Our players know a lot more about what guys do than outsiders would. I don't want to speak for other people, but I think I'm safe in saying our players have total confidence just like the coaches in both quarterbacks, and that's a good thing. But they've earned it. They've worked hard and they've played tough. Beathard threw that one Saturday where he was going to get a mouthful, and that was a huge throw in the game. To me, that was his best play.

When a quarterback takes one -- takes a shot and gets right up, I can promise you the linemen love that. Everybody else responds to that. The defensive guys love it. Typically on good teams the defensive guys respect the good quarterbacks as much as offensive guys do, but that's something you earn. You earn it through practice, and also on the game field.

Q. Has Kenny found a home at fullback?

COACH FERENTZ: Seems to have, and that's a good story too, because we came into this season another position -- we don't have many of them very often, but we had a real good feel about what we had there with Adam and Macon and now

we're down two in that count. John's really not perfect, but he's really adapted to it pretty quickly and really bailed us out and given us an ability to keep a personnel group out there that there are a couple personnel groups we think are important. He's done a really good job, and doing a good job on special teams too.

Q. How did you end up picking him? I know he said he didn't even play it in high school at all?

COACH FERENTZ: Trial and error, I guess, and discussion. Every now and then we get lucky and get one right, and we got that one right.

Q. Coach, you seemed to substitute a lot especially in the second half. Was that by design to stay fresh? How will that pay off in the future?

COACH FERENTZ: Both, part of it was by design, especially up front. The guys in the box, that is the biggest group that we've played this year in quite some time, and they're really a physical, well-coached group. That's a really good offensive football team, so that was part of the plan. In the back end it's been more injuries or ejections, so it was kind of a revolving door. Maurice Fleming got injured in the game, and they got back in there, so it's a real credit to him. Mabin wasn't perfect, but he played. We've had a lot of guys doing that the last couple weeks, and that's a positive sign too. Guys getting up, going out there and getting the job done. So it's really positive.

Anthony Gair, I think responded well. Two weeks ago he did. Wasn't perfect, but he responded well. I think he played better Saturday, and hopefully he'll learn something about himself maybe that he's a little better than he thought he was. One of those deals. Hopefully we'll grow from there.

Q. The linebackers, seemed like you're rotating?

COACH FERENTZ: Part of that is injury related too. We've had guys get nicked up, but again, good to get guys on the field. If they come out with a good, positive experience, that's a plus.

Q. Canzeri had a good outing against Purdue last year. How has his progress been? We haven't seen it statistically? How has his

progress been since that?

COACH FERENTZ: He's been good really until camp. He's had a lot of things that have slowed him down in practice, and I don't think we've seen him a hundred percent yet the way he can play. Hopefully we're getting closer. He had a little injury two weeks ago in that kick return where he came down funny. It's just kind of been a series of things. Hopefully we get him right here and get him going in the near future.

Q. When you guys switched quarterbacks in 2008 what did you need to see? Going back to the question about the amount of thinking that you guys do to pick a quarterback, does that make it hard to reconsider the position?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. You know, I can't remember three weeks ago let alone how many years is that? I'm not good in math. But that was a more drawn out -- I think that would shift back to a year ago where we really didn't know. We were just kind of, if Jake (Rudock) had sputtered, it probably would have maybe played out the way that one did, but Jake really didn't sputter. I thought he kind of took control of things. Now we're in a situation just by fate more than anything else where C.J.'s been able to play when Jake's been hurt, and we were able to discover some good things about C.J. without having the do we, don't we stuff. So it's all good.

Q. Is that a way of saying there are going to be some bumps in the road for C.J.? Maybe that wasn't on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: This week, you mean? Well, there would be some for anybody who is in there, I think. That is just the nature of that position. I'm not saying I'm comfortable because I'm not comfortable right now, but I'm confident that C.J. is going to be well-prepared and he'll play well. I was confident last week he would when he went in. He had a bad practice and that happens. So it happens to a lot of guys and that's part of the growing process. Hopefully as we go along this season we'll get better on a consistent basis.

But all that being said, last week I was confident Jake would play, and if C.J. had it going, no reason to think he wasn't going to play well because we've seen enough of those guys in practice and in competition.

Q. Have you ever had a time here at Iowa where you and the offensive coordinator haven't agreed on who should be the starting quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: I can't remember one, no. I don't think we've had that many tough calls, have we? '08, we were trying to work through that, and you guys probably remember that stuff better than I do. Back in the first couple of years we were round and round and round. That was like the loser got to be the quarterback because three-step and get the ball out. That's all I remember the first year. Ladell Betts was the toughest guy in the history of the program. I think he averaged over four yards a carry that first year. That was an accomplishment. We were young.

Q. Four pretty good tests out of the gate here in nonconference play. How do you feel about the team's progress in the first quarter of the season?

COACH FERENTZ: We kind of looked at this as a five-week block. It's a weird schedule. We've got 5-2-5, so our focus has been on the first five. Running that race as well as we can. We've had some highs, we've had some lows. Probably collectively the second half minus the first carry they had, that is kind of more what we're looking for. But we haven't done it consistently the way we want.

We've got a lot of growth here to still make, and that is exciting because we can get a lot better. The other things I'm enthused about or optimistic about is we have really a good group of players. They work extremely hard, they're very conscientious and they have high character. So those are all positive things, but we can play a lot better, and that's where we've got to get to.

Q. Last year's game, the final score could be misleading because I think it was tied in the second quarter and you guys kind of struggled. Why did you struggle last year early against Purdue?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we scored about 2:45 in the second quarter to go up 14-7. I think I peeked at that last night.

Q. Were you doing something?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't want to sound like I'm giving lectures, but it's a lot more competitive than I think people give it credit for

sometimes. I think we probably respect our opponents a lot more than people outside the building do sometimes. It's just conference play. If you study football, conference play is really unpredictable. Football is really unpredictable at any level, I think. Everybody wants to know the answers on Monday of what's going to happen Saturday or Sunday, but it doesn't work that way. You have to play the games. That is just the nature of sports.

I don't know about the other sports because I really don't follow it that close. But I know a little bit about football. You think you've got the answers, and it's a pretty humbling game, just like life's humbling. They've got a lot of good players, they've got good coaches and they want to win. It's probably going to be that way the next eight opportunities or nine opportunities, whatever we've got here. We're playing eight right now, right? Eight conference games, and that's nine coming up. My guess is all eight of these are going to be dog fights, and if we don't show up with some fight, we'll be the dogs. That's just how it goes.

Q. What does Purdue on defense and what is working well for them?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot. I said this about their whole team, but I think defensively they did a lot last year. It looks to me like they've kind of streamlined. Part of that and going through that, when you go into a new situation you learn about your players, so you're trying to figure out what you can do and can't do and those types of things. But I think they've settled in really well. They've got good size up front, and they're aggressive up front. The secondary does a good job. Their scheme is not like totally out of the ordinary or anything like that. They'll throw some wrinkles at you that, if you're not alert, you'll be in some trouble and they've got a blitz package, which we haven't gotten that far to plan yet. Peaked at it Sunday and yesterday a little bit, and it's pretty intricate and complex, so it's going to be a couple discussions there.

Q. Is it a lot like Ohio State?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I wouldn't say that, no. I'm going off memory. It's been a while too, but I mean, maybe in some general, the front. I'm going back to 2010 right now. That is the one that pops into my mind. The front itself is similar, but the blitz package, I would say is different. It's a little bit. Again, we haven't put it up on the board

and talked about it. We'll do that tomorrow morning. But looking at it Sunday I was like, okay, this is going to be a little cause for indigestion. We'll go from there.

Q. Coach, this week there's been a picture floating around on social media of a picture of a guy with a tattoo of your face on his leg.

COACH FERENTZ: Okay. I've heard about it. I haven't seen it.

Q. What do you think about how crazy fans can be?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he probably needs a hobby or two would be my guess. I don't know. I will say this: Our fans have been outstanding. We have a great group over in Pittsburgh. We've played at Kinnick three times and they've been stellar. There are a lot of people really enthused about our football team and we really appreciate that. But I'm not sure I'd recommend going to that extreme. But I did hear about that one, actually.

Q. Going back to Purdue, you mentioned this is year to year. They were undergoing a major transition in how they do things, especially on offense. What kind of strides have you seen from them, and what kind of strides have you seen from Danny Etling in adjusting to this new type of scheme?

COACH FERENTZ: Two things that jump out. I read that this morning about the points off turnovers. They're doing a really good job. That's good team football if you get a turnover and convert it into points. That's just a good sign, good indicator. Anytime they made the decision last year, it was a hard call, not a clear cut one, but they went to Danny Etling as a true freshman, and we knew him very well. He was a really good player in high school. Really good player. So they made the decision, and now they're so much further down the road than when we played them.

I can't remember how many games they had started when we played them, but it's just a world of difference, especially when a first-year player has to start. That's not easy. So I don't work there, but I'm just imagining like last spring, this summer for their offensive staff to play with a guy who really understands the language and understands what they're trying to get

accomplished, that is a good thing. Then they've got some guys that have a big offensive line. They have excellent tight ends. They've got two backs that are very, very quick, and then they ran their younger guy the other day, and he's an excellent running back. So they've got a good group of receivers.

They've been very, very productive and doing a good job. They've got all the makings. It's just a matter now of putting things together and pushing forward. But I think they're making strides right now, and certainly Saturday they looked really good.

Q. You moved into Top 10 career wins in a school in Big Ten history. Do you have any thoughts about that?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I'll give you a quick one. I think I did something of note up in East Lansing in 2012. We didn't win a game the next six times out. So we'll think about that stuff later on. I'm not sure what happened, but we'll think about that in the other season.

Q. Do you think the casual fan understands at all what goes into picking a starter?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, probably not. But why would they? We'll play whoever is ready to go. It's not that big a deal to us. We'll rally whoever is out there. We're not going to put Jake out there if he's not able to play the way he has to. C.J. will be ready to go if that's the way it turns out.

Q. Do you think the talent that you have on the right side sometimes gets overshadowed by the left?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, I mean, Scherff's a rare guy. I won't say that about too many guys, but I'd sound like an idiot if I didn't say that because he's a really special football player, and you're lucky to get guys like that every now and then. But Andrew Donnal is a really good player too, so is Austin Blythe. Those guys are pretty experienced guys.

So I mean, he's (Donnal) a really good player and tackles are hard to find. Good tackles are really hard to find, so we're just thrilled he's playing well and doing a really good job out there. We're really happy for him?

Q. Speaking of Scherff, what was the reaction like when you saw his blitz pick up?

COACH FERENTZ: I said, he's a pretty unique player. There aren't a lot of guys that do things like that. You know, it's probably more about the guy that got hit's reaction than mine. But he's a guy that loves playing. He's got good awareness, and that's what that player showed really. Good vision, good awareness, which is an important trait for everybody.

Q. For the first time since 1948 you've had four games decided by one possession. You're the only team in the country that's done that this season, and pretty sure over the last six or seven years you've been right up at the top. Why is this a one possession game kind of program?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a fair question. I don't know. It really doesn't concern me that much as long as we come out on the right side of those possessions. But, yeah, I don't know. To me it's kind of the nature of sports in some ways.

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