

November 28, 2014



A Postgame Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: Needless to say, a disappointing loss for our football team. Fans were great today, great crowd, and tough way for 16 outstanding seniors to go out and finish up in Kinnick. Certainly wanted to get the win for a lot of reasons, but that was one of them. Sending those guys off in good fashion, they've done a great job throughout their entire careers here, on the field, off the field, in the classroom. They've done a really good job. Really good group of guys. Certainly a disappointing outcome.

Like last week, I think we played hard. I think both teams competed really hard out there, fought and competed, and obviously today we just didn't make enough plays to win and made too many bad plays. That makes it really tough to win on top of it. That's kind of the story of the game.

Q. Did you feel like the game got away in the first half in the sense that you had a 1st and goal inside the 10 three times, and came away with one field goal?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, at any time -- the turnovers were the obvious story the first half, four turnovers, and then one got negated with John Lowdermilk's pick six. But you turn the ball over any time, and we have not done a good enough job this year overall in that category. If I was going to point to one thing, that's where I'd start. That got amplified today. There's no one reason for that other than they're all costly, and any time you're in there with a chance to get points, you certainly want to come away with points.

Q. Did you sense that you tried to get more points in that first half, and that turnover,

the fourth one, where they scored, do you think that maybe gave their offense some juice?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, really up to that point they hadn't done much. Our defense was really playing well, and we dropped a receiver on that possession. I think it was 3rd down. I'm not sure exactly. So that kind of came back and bit us there. Yeah, if we could have gotten out of there -- how am I going to say this, as bad as we were playing because that wasn't the case, but as unclean as we were playing in that first half, to be up 10-0 would have been great.

Q. And you had it to 24-7, too.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we had our opportunities, no question about that. But the two things that really cost us today were the turnovers and then errors or misgivings in the special teams area. I'm not going to say it came as a surprise. We thought that returner was as dangerous a guy as we've seen this season, so we knew that part, had great respect for him, but we just didn't punt and cover well enough, especially on those two opportunities.

Q. Were you cognizant of trying to punt away from him or just punt it?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we had a plan. It didn't exactly work the way we hoped. And then you've got to get down there and cover, too. You've got to disrupt him, can't let him get started upfield, which on those two he got a quick start and got going. Again, it's fundamental football, and if you don't do that well enough with a player like that, you're going to pay for it.

Q. Why did the offense freeze up in the second half?

KIRK FERENTZ: That's football. There's ebb and flow. You could probably ask the same thing about their offense in the first half up until the last drive. That's football. It goes back and forth,

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and fortunately we were able to get it going again and get back there and score to get to 28.

Q. In Chicago in July you were pretty optimistic and your players were talking about winning the division and so forth. Is 7-5 a little hard to fathom right now?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not going to get too global in my thoughts, but I'll say this: I've really felt like since 2001 just in broad, sweeping statements, for the most part we're going to have an opportunity to compete for the championship. That's our goal. We're not going to back down from that. That would be ridiculous. But I think as we all know, there are twists and turns that go on in any season. I'd love to know how many people wrote down in August that Minnesota would have eight wins right now. That doesn't surprise me; they're a veteran ballclub, well-coached and they're playing very well. Not many people had Maryland down for seven wins at this time, but that didn't surprise me, either. You do some research there, well-coached team, a very veteran team.

My point there is that there's a lot of teams competing in our conference on both sides. I don't think that other division is panning out quite the way everybody thought it was going to, but that's football. You never know what's going to happen; you take it a week at a time. Circumstances change, your team changes, injuries, all those things that can take place, so that's what makes it interesting. That's sports.

Hey, when the season is over, we've got one more game, we'll evaluate everything and then talk about that stuff at that point.

Q. When this happens in the last game does the sting last longer?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's like losing a bowl game. There's nothing to move you on the to next one, and one thing about last week, at least we had to move faster than we normally do because the week started on Monday instead of Tuesday with the team. Yeah, it'll linger, but the big thing is we've got to get back up on our feet and figure out how to win our eighth game.

Q. What do people buy into now? You guys lost all rivalry games this year, 7-5 after expectations were a little higher than that.

KIRK FERENTZ: I just kind of addressed the expectation stuff, but we lost five ballgames. Each one is a different story. I'm not going to sit here tonight and just dissect it. I'll talk about

today's game. But I will say again there's no way to predict this stuff in August how it's going to go. You practice as well as you can, you prepare as well as you can, coach as hard, play as hard, and all I know is we came up short last week, we came up short today, against two teams I think are pretty good teams, and I think both teams competed hard last week and this week, and that's football. The week before that we won.

Q. Did your team let down the second half when they were 24-7?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I can't read minds, but the third quarter didn't go great for us. But we battled back. They took the lead, we battled back. It was a good football game. Two teams competing, and I don't know what everybody was thinking, but I didn't see anybody quit out there.

Q. The big plays --

KIRK FERENTZ: I just addressed that a minute ago. I think probably the two biggest plays were the punt returns, and we probably didn't punt the ball well enough and certainly didn't cover well enough. I don't think anybody let down. It was just a really good player making two good plays, and we weren't up to taking him on. He's a really good punt returner. I don't know if you've looked at his statistics. Those are earned. Stats mean something right now in November.

Q. How do you play a game like this when there's so many plays that maybe if one play maybe would have gone differently --

KIRK FERENTZ: Same about last week, you know, and you've got to let it go and you've got to move on. You've got to live in the present, but you've got to correct and teach and all that stuff. That's part of what coaches do. Teachers do the same thing. But at some point you've got to move forward, too, and we've got an opportunity, have one more game to get our eighth win, and that's what we'll focus on whenever we get back together.

Q. What about this season -- is there anything about this season you recall satisfying?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a great group of players we've got. They're working hard. They've worked hard, and these 16 seniors

embodied that since January when they became seniors. They've been great to work with. Their attitude has been good. Their work ethic is good. I'd say that about our whole football team. They've done a really good job in basically all regards. But we've come up short in some games.

Q. In the overtime play, what was your view of the play?

KIRK FERENTZ: I really couldn't see it when it did take place. I did see the replay, and it's probably a discussion, but it doesn't really matter at this point.

Q. With Jake's performance last week, he was excellent the second half, this week a little sketchier, what did you feel like you got out of your quarterback this year, and what's kind of right now the balance between CJ and Jake?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, Jake is our starter, CJ is a great No. 2. I've said that, and just like football ebbs and flows, and it's the same way with individuals' performances at all positions. Quarterbacks get scrutinized because they're quarterbacks, but most players have ups and downs and have bad plays and what have you, and Jake certainly has had a few, too. But I thought he played really well, and I could go down the list. We had a lot of guys really play well.

Q. Was there any consideration of putting CJ in?

KIRK FERENTZ: Today?

Q. Yeah.

KIRK FERENTZ: Not that I'm aware of. We never talked about it.

Q. A few moments ago you said, to paraphrase, since 2001 the state goal is to compete for championships. Do you feel you're very close?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, you never know. I'll go backtrack for a second here, go back to last week. That was an outstanding football team in my opinion, an outstanding football team we played, and who knows what'll happen with them tomorrow. It's probably a little closer than anybody thinks, but there's also distance in there. The years we have won it, things really have to fall right and we have to really gel. I know this, we have to protect the football. In both of the championship season we did a good job on

turnover-takeaway ratios, and special teams really helped us. We've got a lot of room to improve in those regards. I'm not happy with our turnover-takeaway ratio by any stretch. That's the first thing I'd bring up if I were to critique our team, which I really don't want to spend tonight doing. But it's kind of football 101. It's an area we've got to shore up here in the next month to start with, and then moving forward that'll be on the list.

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