

November 28, 2012



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, welcome everybody. I apologize ahead of time. I was asking Steve what's out there, and it sounds like there are a lot of good rumors going around. This won't be as interesting and dramatic as maybe people want it to be. But, nonetheless, just thought it was a good way to wrap the year up and field some questions and we'll get together in February.

First of all, I want to congratulate the award winners on the team. The All-Big Ten team came out on Monday or Tuesday, whenever that was, I think Monday. And certainly of note, Micah Hyde not only being first team, but winning the Tatum-Woodson Defensive Back of the Year Award, and following up on Marvin's award last year, that's really a prestigious thing and a nice highlight to a very good career. A guy that played four years and did a great job in a lot of phases and was a really valuable team member, so that's nice recognition.

He being a first team guy, James Ferentz being second team, and C.J., Anthony Hitchens, Mike Meyer, Matt Tobin, Joe Gaglione, and James Morris all getting honorable mention, and James Vandenberg, the Sportsmanship Award. Certainly nice honors for all of those guys.

Now just looking back really quickly, and I'll field questions. Unlike trying to put a spin on a \$15 trillion deficit, I'm not going to go down that road. Bottom line, this was a disappointing season in terms of record, and the fact that we're not playing in a bowl game. There really isn't a way to put a positive spin on that. It is kind of what it is.

So things happen in college football, they happen in the NFL, and they happen in high school football. Certainly we're not pleased about being

home, but that's the way it shook out. I think if you look at the big picture a little bit over 12 years, I think we're second in the conference in terms of being .500-plus or better seasons overall, be it overall records of Big Ten records. We have gone to ten bowls and been nationally ranked five times in the Top 10, and all of that. So those are positives, certainly.

That being said, .500 is certainly not our goal, and that's not what we're shooting for in any season. If you break it down with all the eight losses, it's really where our focus is right now. In two games, we were never really competitive. That's disappointing. We had six games that we lost by an average of four and a half points, and there were things that go on and are involved in that and lead to that. But we're not in the excuse business. We'll try to move forward and see if we can't do things a little bit better.

If there's any solace in this, you go back to '06, I referenced that on Friday or Saturday, excuse me, we're 2-6 in the Big Ten that year. We lost six conference games in a row, and that was not much fun. We did have a chance to play in a bowl and at least start moving forward a little bit. In '07 we didn't go to a bowl, and followed up with two of our best seasons, the most enjoyable seasons ever in '08 and '09.

I don't want to look at this as an impossible task by any stretch. Right now, our focus is on improving and finding solutions to what might have taken place. If there is a blessing in all of this, we get a little more time than we would in a normal situation. So it's an opportunity for us to work a little more thoroughly and hopefully do a better job of moving forward, and that's what we're focused on right now. We've got a lot of work, that's begun and we'll continue as we move on.

Q. Will Greg Davis be your offensive coordinator in 2013?

COACH FERENTZ: As far as I know,

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yeah.

Q. What has he done over the last few months that demonstrates him remaining on your staff next year?

COACH FERENTZ: Wow, the firing line, huh? I think Greg's an excellent football coach. He's a tremendous professional and a tremendous person. So I've got every bit of confidence that Greg will be in. Not only getting into tenures or job security and all that stuff. That's not what we're here for. But Greg's a tremendous football coach. We wouldn't have brought him here ten months ago or however many if we didn't feel that way. I feel stronger about the kind of coaching person he is now after working with him.

Q. What did you do to get our self-described valley of '06-07?

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. It's interesting, I just got a note from someone I've got a lot of high regard for, who competes at a real high level in a different sport. You know, he touched on some things, and this is prior to last week's game. It came mid-week last week, I just happened to read it today. But he touched on things that were important to him.

It's not what anybody wants to hear, but it's a matter of getting back to basics and doing the basics better. Usually the answers aren't calculus equations. It's a matter of doing things better on a more frequent basis, and that is the challenge ahead for us. It's a little more involved in that.

Obviously there are a lot of things, when you go 4-8, there is really nothing that measures up in any area that is good enough. That's our job to go through every detail in the program and the way everybody approaches it and it starts with me.

Q. Do you tweak your staff in any way going into next year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're 4-8 right now, so I think we have to be open to everything: Be it staff, players, where guys lineup, all those types of things. It's not something typically you make a rash decision on. It's things that you have to look at, and I think you have to look at how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. I think I said it Friday or last Tuesday. I think it was Friday, but we've got good people on our staff, good coaches.

The majority of these guys were here in '08 and '09. It's not like we've got a bunch of dumbbells here. They did a good job of carrying

me during that period, so hopefully we can get back to that point. We have good people here.

Q. Do you anticipate any changes? Do you have anybody leaving?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I can't speak for everybody. You know, this is one press conference where I don't think people are going to ask if I've been contacted by anybody other than a Division III job in Montana or something like that. But you just never know. There is no way to predict that. We have guys that may have opportunities. We'll just see how that plays out.

Q. Coach, is it too early to look back on this season and the offensive struggles and things maybe that Greg was too inflexible to adapting his scheme to the existing personnel? Is that likely to be one of the changes going forward?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think any time you go into a situation that there is a learning curve. It's true for any of us. If we go into a new job and you have people that you're working with for the first time and players the same way. If you're doing your job well, that pertains to all of us again. You're learning every day on the job. In this formula the study is changing every day. Just injuries factor in and all kinds of things. It's no question, it's a learning curve for all of us. Greg's probably a smarter Iowa coach for us than he was in February. How could you not be?

We've had some great discussion, and I think he's got a real firm handle on our best path moving forward at least at this point it's early in the game. I think we're all seeing it the same way. At least he and I are. As we get the whole staff together, we'll have those discussions too. But naturally, any time you have change, and we had a lot of change last year.

Two things I knew going into the season: We had two position coaches in the same position from last year, and we had a young football team. So I knew those going ahead. The other thing I would add is we knew there were going to be challenges along the course of the year. There are every year. And how you handle those challenges a lot of times dictates losing close games. That's the difference between winning or losing quite often. We can certainly do better in that part of the equation.

Q. Are there some things with offensive changes that require getting out of camp and playing to see if they work? Kevonte and Keenan told me media day there were some backyard aspects to the offense and they liked it. But once you're out of the season, it may be hard to change who you are and what you've worked on.

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. Certainly if you're having a good year, and things are going well, guys can get more comfortable with each other and all that type of thing. It's a really dynamic process. Even in August, and I said this before, I wasn't sure we had a running back that could play all three downs. I didn't know what we had. Damon was our best chance.

I feel a lot better about him now four months later than I did back on August first. He wasn't able to run the whole race. But when he was in there, he's certainly shown signs of being a guy that can play well at this level. But that factor changes other things as well. Everything affects everything, basically, and that's how it is, offensively or defensively.

Q. The defensive line going up-and-down, did you ever have any thoughts about bringing a red shirt out?

COACH FERENTZ: No, in a perfect world, we would have kept Drew off the field. The role that Drew ended up playing, was a role that we envisioned for Riley McMinn, and Riley might have been healthy two weeks out of 16 or 17. So that necessitated making that decision. We put Drew out there. We'd rather hold him back, but Riley couldn't go.

But the upside was Drew got his feet wet here and got some education. I think that will move him forward and give him a better chance to compete at a higher level next year. When you put a guy out there that is a high school tight end, to expect him to go up there, not realistic. But I thought he did a good job. That's a little more subtle than some of the other positions. But, nonetheless, McMinn was a guy that we had seen go hard against Riley Reiff every day in practice, competed like crazy against him two years ago, and we thought for sure he would be our third or fourth defensive end this year. Just didn't work out.

As far as going back to your points, I think they're better served to red shirt, and I'm enthused about both of those young guys. They have great attitudes and good potential, and they have

something that you can't coach. They're both big guys.

Q. At what point do you confirm a transfer?

COACH FERENTZ: It could be any time. That was another rumor that came to me. That was not only out there. It landed on my desk somewhere in the last 48 hours. Someone had one of our quarterbacks transferring to a school in New Orleans, which may be true. I don't know.

But the fact that the player in question came and grabbed me yesterday morning after the meeting and said, Coach, we sat down at 2:00, and it was the exact opposite of him going to New Orleans. I just said I can't tell you the source on that one either, but it was interesting. Had me nervous for a while. Said I can't wait till 2:00 o'clock to find out what's going to happen here.

Q. Your running back situation with Weisman now there full-time, would you consider doing something more with them or are they going to all stay at running back?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I think it was asked probably eight weeks ago or nine weeks ago, would you consider Bullock and Weisman on the field at the same time? And absolutely. We've just never had that opportunity. Any time you have guys that are capable of helping the football team, we've got to find a way to get them on the field. You know, one thing we didn't know we had three months ago was Weisman was a running back. We knew we had him as a fullback. So that is a pleasant development.

As I said earlier, we were hoping Damon could be a good player and show that he could play in the Big Ten. We have a level of confidence that he can be a good player and we think he's a guy that has flexibility. Mark can play full back or running back, and Damon can play inside or outside.

Biggest question I had in August was would he block anybody? Turn on the Penn State game, the Wisconsin-Penn State game, I see Monter Ball stick in there and pick up the safety blitz. It's part of playing that position. Damon made strides there, and that's a good thing.

To answer the question, as we go through the roster, you're always handicapping this and where do you see this guy and those two guys. We have confidence they'll play well. The trick is

to get them both on the field healthy at once. We can never get them dressed in the same week.

Q. On your offense you're either a running back or a receiver. Can there be a blend?

COACH FERENTZ: You probably know this, but Ronnie Harmon came as a running back. I'm not trying to compare Damon to Ronnie by any stretch of the imagination. But if you look it up, I think we had 120 yards against Iowa State in 1982, couple yards more or less. But it was a pretty tough day.

Tony Wanket picked one off, so we lost 19-7. Went out the next week and picked up 430 or 440 of offense against Arizona. That's when Ronnie went outside and became our spot receiver. It was a rental. He only did it for the next three years. Coach Fry suckered him on that one.

But he played in the NFL. So, anyways, you have a guy that can give you a spark out there, heck, yeah, you want to get him on the field. We think Jordan Cotton's a very different player than he was four months ago. So that's encouraging too.

Q. How does a season like this affect recruiting short term and longer term?

COACH FERENTZ: I would be more concerned longer term than short. I think, you know, it's like transfers. I think anything could happen at any time. We've got approximately 15 guys committed. As far as I know, everything's solid, and our guys were actually out seeing people and talking to them face-to-face as opposed to the phone and things like that. All of our guys are out seeing the guys right now. Everything's really positive.

I think our team is like that too. We all realize we have a lot of work to do. But this is hardly a hopeless situation. It's not like we have to climb Mt. Everest here. I think it's more than enough potential currently on campus to be a successful football team next year, and hopefully we'll add to it. We have some good guys committed. So I think from everything I've been able to ascertain so far, we'll come in and be part of the upswing and get this thing back on track where it needs to be. I think that's exactly what we're looking for.

That's what I think all of us as coaches want from the players on campus. We certainly want to bring guys in with that attitude. Not mopes, and gosh, oh, this is tough and all that jazz, we're

not looking for that. You need people that want to lineup and play and compete.

We're not that far away. I think that's at least the sense I have. We have a big recruiting weekend coming up next week. My guess is that is going to be the tenor. It's like anything. Lot of times you lose a game on Saturday, and you feel like crap. Usually the best thing after a bad loss is to get on the field on Tuesday, and being around your players and feeling the energy that they have. My sense is the recruits will come in and do that same thing. They're going to come in here. They've bought into this program for the right reasons, and they're going to come in being committed to putting the thing where we want to put it.

Q. How married are you to your philosophy? We've talked about this a lot over the years.

COACH FERENTZ: Specifically, what part of my philosophy?

Q. Just the balanced offense the bend-don't-break defense, special teams?

COACH FERENTZ: What I'm married to is what's going to work, to give us the best chance to win. That's what I'm married to. I know that defensively, if you give up missed tackles and big plays, you're not going to be successful. Offensively, same thing. Whether you throw it 80 times a game or 10, you turn it over. You don't block people. Some people can move the ball without blocking them. But I don't think that's going to ever fit here. It would be really tough to pull that off.

The bottom line is we'll do whatever we have to win, and philosophically, not talking about doing stupid stuff. My biggest concern is that we're doing things that are smart and fundamentally sound, people turn on the film and say, hey quite frankly there are time this year that you can't say that. I'm not going to try to spin that. It's like saying there isn't a, what, \$15 trillion deficit there? There is one, and it ain't going away. We've got to knock our deficit down, realize there is one, and work on it. And those are all things that are correctible for the most part.

The other stuff, you can live with coming up short if you're not good enough. If you don't play well enough, there are a lot of things that go into that, that is the hard part.

Q. Maybe some of the disconnects this year is you never did find what players could do best or did you?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we did a decent job. But there were a lot of variables that went into some of our lack of success. It's interesting, too, you talk about momentum in a game and momentum swings, and I think you have seasons too. Typically in a game, every now and then you get one of those games where you get slaughtered from the start, or boom, the game is over in the second quarter. Illinois in 1985, 49-0 at halftime.

Every now and then you get one of those, but typically in the course of a game, it's going to go back and forth. And when it goes against you, you have to push through it and we never did that this year. That is the bottom line. We've been through that in '06.

I do want to say this for the record, and I'm not trying to trash any teams, because we had a lot of good guys on that '06 team. I mean a lot of good guys working their tails off. We had a lot of guys working their tails of this year. But we just didn't have enough. They were a good group of guys, and I'm not suggesting '06 wasn't. It wasn't for a lack of trying. We just have to do better.

Q. Much has been written and said about the team's lack of speed, can you address that in one off-season?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. It's interesting. That was a complaint in the '80s. I know it was a big topic of conversation that Miami series, '92 the '93. And historically, I'll say this: We've played some quote unquote fast teams in bowls and beaten them, but we lost in the combine and we were able to beat them on the field.

However it shakes out in terms of those things, you want to be as good as you can and in a perfect world you have a mature team, and a team that's as fast as they can be and as strong as they can be. But it doesn't always work that way. So if you're a little short or deficient than your opponent, you have to find a different way to get around the challenge or the obstacle.

So that is part of the challenge in this whole thing. We didn't do a good enough job in that regard. We're always going to play teams on our schedule. Maybe this team one year and another team another year that's faster, bigger, stronger, all those type of things. And you have to find a way to get around those things. You're not

going to beat them in the race, but what are you going to do?

Q. At quarterback, you're going to have at least three guys competing. What is going to go into the evaluation period as far as determining whether one of those guys is going to stand out?

COACH FERENTZ: The bottom line, the acid test for everything is how are they playing in games? And we're not going to know that until next September. I know there is some clamoring to get guys throughout for a series here and there. It's something that we're going to have to go through and we know that. We knew that a year ago going into this thing.

But basically, we'll make it a fair competition. We'll evaluate them like we would anybody. They'll have a chance to go first offense, and hopefully they'll work better with the first offense than the second and factor all that in. And we'll make a call when it's appropriate and go with whomever.

The good news is we've for a long time felt good about all three of the guys here on campus. Cody got here last year, was here for the spring ball practice, and C.J. joined us in August, and Jake was here prior to both of those guys. We've had a good vibe about all three of them. So I think it's going to be a really good, healthy competition, and I'm anxious to see those guys compete. I think Greg feels the same way.

Q. What are some of the things you'll look for since you don't have that game experience to evaluate?

COACH FERENTZ: Who moves the team, who reacts under pressure, who is accurate throwing the football, and who has leadership capabilities? All of those kinds of things. There is a lot that goes into it. I think all three of the guys are eager to compete.

I'll go back to 1987. Only thing I was sure at the end of spring practice that year was Hartlieb was not our starter. I was sure it was McGwire or Poholsky. And we had seen Poholsky as the player of the game in '86 against Michigan State. We saw him play well in Big Ten competition. That is ABC Chevy Player of the Game, back in the old days when ABC was the only thing that televised. Dating myself. And McGwire was the top guy out of California, and an eventual first round draft pick.

And lo and behold, Chuck Hartlieb, the guy nobody knew about or cared about, ended up being our leader of the team and is still in the record books.

That is the neat thing about all of this stuff. It is pretty interesting to see how it goes. If you had asked me in April, I would have said okay, I know who is third. I'm not sure who one and two are, I know who third is. So that is the fun part about all of this stuff. They had a good year that year too. That was '87, right? Yeah, Vlasic was '86 and '87. We did okay.

Q. When you guys are winning and going well, you said this in Chicago a couple years ago, defense a lot of times setting the tone and really what you guys are at the core. Nine guys coming back, does there need to be more competition pushing the nine guys? What needs to be the fix there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, well, competition is a problem at any position. You know or a challenge, maybe, not a problem. Lot of times it is a problem because the schools that get the guys that walk in and look like they're seniors or juniors, those schools I would venture to say have a different environment on the practice field as opposed to when you're developing guys. Like Drew Ott was a great kid, but put him up against Brandon Scherff last August, and it wasn't really a fair fight. When Drew Ott's a senior or junior, hopefully next year, he'll be able to play against those guys and do darn well.

So creating competition helps, and I know our wrestling program has done a phenomenal job. They get these guys that come back that are world champions and 20 years old, and they're flipping those guys around. How can you not get better? So, the more of that you can create, the better.

Just point of defense, historically, that's kind of -- I go back to the '80s, and you think about the Bill Walsh offensive teams and the Redskins with the Hogs and all that stuff. Those teams play good defense as did the Steelers, the dominant teams, and Dallas when they had it going with Aikman and all that, and they had marquis guys on offense, but their defense was always tough.

The thing about defense is it gives you a chance in any game, in any sport typically, but it's not easy. If you can keep people's point totals down, it helps. But I'm optimistic. I think we have the potential to be good there.

Q. Have there been any concrete position changes that you're talking about?

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COACH FERENTZ: No, it's early in the game. I'm spending more time with last year's seniors and a couple of the other guys. But that will be part of the process. We might have it. But I don't know if anything will be sensational or dramatic, but we'll try to get guys in the best spot.

Q. Talk about the recruiting roles, but can you take advantage and turn it into a positive if you're not going to a bowl this year with recruiting?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely.

Q. Have other people done that when you guys have been preparing?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I've said that before. Decembers are crazy when you're in a bowl. It's a good crazy, but you're sitting there recruiting and trying to do some game prep. You're trying to keep an eye on everybody on campus. It's a real contradiction in college sports. Our guys all hit the road Sunday, our coaches did Sunday and Monday morning, and our players are in the most critical period academically. They have two weeks of class and finals coming up, and we'll be on the road all three of those weeks. I'll be gone a lot here in the next two weeks.

So you'd rather be around your players when it's an important time. Same thing happens in May, so it's kind of unfortunate.

But, yeah, we have more time to -- if there's a good thing, we have a lot more time on that. The recruiting part, self-examination, talking to our players, developing them. We can't take them out on the field and practice, but we have a lot of time now that we can visit and things you don't do enough with your kids at home, or your wife, you can sit down and talk to each other a little bit. So that's the positive side of this. And you have to figure out where to get a Christmas tree. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that. I'll probably get in trouble, but that will be the next quest here.

Q. Are you still looking at three or four, or will you look JUCO?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. We'll look anywhere. We're going to try to improve the team, JUCO, high school, we'll look at anybody, anything right now if we think they can help us. But you have to try to project how they're going to fit on campus, and will they be able to have success here in all realms, not just football-wise. But we

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have an open mind to everything.

I said it earlier in the day, everything is on the board. We have to look at it. What can we do to help this football team? If we can help it faster than later, that's good.

Q. Will you look for another quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: If John Elway Jr., calls or one of those guys, yeah, that wouldn't be bad.

Q. What needs do you think you have to fill?

COACH FERENTZ: I think just looking at some defensive needs right now. We have three senior linebackers, but we're thin and we've been depleted there medically. So that is certainly a concern. Then on the offensive side, guys that could score touchdowns would be a good thing. We've got a couple, so if we could get some more, that would be great.

Q. If Vandenberg had come in this year as a red shirt freshman would the results have been a lot different this year?

COACH FERENTZ: There is no way to say, yeah, for sure. But there is a transition there, no question about it. Nobody could have or did work harder than James. We're all going to live through this. Nobody wants to hear that. I know that. But we're going to live through this and get better.

I feel bad for all of our seniors because those guys worked harder than a 4-8 year. That's hard, and nobody more than James, besides me, and I'm not sure I'm first anymore. I think I might be third. I don't really scan that stuff.

But clearly James and Greg were lightning rods, and Ken was when he was here. Ken's a good coach. That's been proven and documented. Yet, I think the thing I'm trying to say is James had a tough year on the field. No question about it. I don't think anybody could have done a better job off the field in handling it and dealing with it and representing himself in a class way. Anybody that is paying attention, if they don't have respect for that young guy, they're missing the whole boat.

We didn't design a 4-8 year to check everybody's mettle and all that jazz, but your mettle gets checked pretty good. When Bruce Nelson was here, he's had a lot of things, but two things that are pertinent. You find out who is who and what is what when things aren't going well.

And I think James Vandenberg showed who he is and what he is in a stellar fashion. He told the players what he doesn't miss is practice, but that's also where the work gets done.

That's where we're at right now. We've got work in the spring conditioning phase, academics, all of those things. They'll be on the field in March, and nobody wants to hear it, but I think Bruce hit it on the head. That's what it comes down to, hard work. That's how you change things and how you improve. It's painful. Sometimes it's painful, and that's just the way it goes. But it's all about getting better. I think everybody here is committed to it, and I'm really looking forward to getting that started here.

Q. You had a transition obviously, and then a mini transition after the Penn State game. You lose Scherff, your best left tackle, slide your left guard over to left tackle. Then Ott is out, and Brad Rogers never played effectively pretty much the rest of the season. How much did that impact what you guys were able to do the second half of the season?

COACH FERENTZ: When you go into a season with a young team, any injury doesn't help. One that wasn't talked about at all or at least stuff I read, but it affected things. We had a plan there, and that altered things there. Not that that affected the record, necessarily, but all of these things add up. What you're alluding to there, we not only lost him, we lost arguably our best or most talented tackle plus our third tackle with Donnal. Donnal's got a great future. He was playing good at guard, but he was our next tackle in. Subsequently, Tobin was playing well at guard, and he moves out. So when you have a team that's young and thin, that doesn't help.

Brad Rogers is a story that hasn't been talked about much. But all the things that he's been through. My Kodak moment with him would be 2010 when he played at Michigan. He played well. He's done so many good things. But I just coincidentally was walking in with him back last week in July, next to last week in July. We came into the building together, and he was walking down the sidewalk, looked like Amos McCoy. It was like -- whatever show he was on, you know, that older guy? He had a back problem. So basically we kind of lost him for the whole year.

Brad's not only a good player, but a team leader. So, again, everybody's got a story.

Everybody's got hardships and challenges and excuses are easy to find.

Q. How difficult is it for you. Those are realistic challenges, but you can't talk about it because people don't want to hear excuses?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's about my tenth flashback moment out here today. I'll give you another one when Sam Aiello got drilled out there when we were practicing before the Ohio State game in 2000. I've said this before. But that was the first time and only time I allowed myself to think, maybe this ain't going to work. Maybe this isn't meant to be. I can't remember who it was, but they ran right into his back, they went down. And similar to this year, we were running out of linemen. Not that we had an abundance going into it.

So that was one moment where I said this is a challenge here, and that happens to anybody in their job. It happens to people in their personal lives too. Things are more serious than an injury. I'm not trying to minimize that. But everybody knows that's part of football. Everybody knows, coaches know that, every player that plays realizes it's not a game that was built for the body orthopedically, and that is part of the deal.

Most guys that have played would go back they'd do it again. There is no logical explanation for that. So you know going into every year there is going to be heartache down the road that somebody's going to get some time stripped away from them. That is just part of the deal.

Q. Are you going into new recruiting territories?

COACH FERENTZ: You guys probably know more about it than I do, but basically we try to accentuate the Big Ten areas which are expanding. I guess we beat them to the punch on that, because we've gone around to New Jersey and Maryland, and D.C. area. We fool around a little bit down in Texas. I think that's a little bit more of a challenge than maybe it was just the way things have gone in the conferences and TV and all that type of thing. Then we'll look at other areas too, but that is the focus right now.

Q. Can you talk about going down to Texas?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Greg and Phil are spending a lot more time here. That's always been my plan. It was after the first year in '99. That way we can keep the coordinators here. And

he wanted to get out and do some things and all that, and it worked out well. But my preference with him would have been to be here more and spend more time with our players. Somebody that could be a stable face for the players and work on the system, and program development.

Q. So Greg will spent most of his time here?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he'll be out seeing a prospect this weekend, Friday and Saturday. But he'll be here more than he'll be out.

Q. You don't have to look for starting centers very often. Who have you identified for that slot?

COACH FERENTZ: Someone that's under 6 foot. That's a requisite. I'm lying. The NFL had him at 6'1" something. He must have been standing on something. But those guys are usually pretty good. I think we have a couple good candidates. We have a positive story. Conor Boffeli stepped in and played well the last couple of weeks. He grew with each opportunity against good players. That was good to see.

We felt like he has that capability and potential, and I think he realized it. He had some fun out there. He did some good things. Blake got off to a good start; he got hurt, and that is when Donnal went in. Austin was a red shirt freshman, so when he came back, it might as well have been spring ball again. Young guys tend to forget everything they've learned.

By the end of the year, he was playing back where he was earlier in the year. So I think those will be our two top candidates right now. I'm not sure. They'll both have to play. They've both played in practice. So we have two guys. We have Eric Simmons who has red shirted this year. We were able to keep him off the floor. We wanted to do that. That was the main reason we brought him in last year. Try to get him trained, get him started. I think we have three guys there that have the potential to be good players. And Eric, I know he's under 6'2", so he fits that criteria.

Q. How do your young coaches like LeVar, when he was here he played on not so good teams, and Brian was part of the Big Ten Championship team -- they both had different ends of the scale. How do they take 4-8? How do they react to that?

COACH FERENTZ: Nobody's happy. I can't imagine anybody being happy about it, except people that don't like us. I'm sure they're thrilled to death, but nobody in our program is happy or satisfied. You can't be. It's not what we want.

Q. Are there any wow moments?

COACH FERENTZ: We all do. It's not fun. I picked Matt Kroul as honorary captain a couple weeks prior. I thought he was a perfect voice prior to the Nebraska game. Matt went through '06. He was a starter here in '05, '06-'07, '08. What a span he's had. He's seen the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Nobody want it's, but sometimes unfortunately it's part of football. It's part of football and part of competition. The trick is not to be on the bottom side of that 4-8. But that's where we're at right now. So the energy and the tension has to be on solutions. That's what we're focused on.

Q. Off-season surgeries, anything to report there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Brad's back will be addressed. I'm just trying to think. I think right now we're otherwise okay, I think. There is one guy being checked on. So hopefully a guy that played all year. Hopefully we won't have to do anything.

Q. When you go on the circuit or make public appearances or whatever the case over the next several months, what is your pitch to people who maybe aren't as receiving about your body of work, but are more inclined to live in the moment?

COACH FERENTZ: That's the world we live in. That's the reality of it. I would say the number of people. Just judging on the current events I've seen over the last week and a half in the coaching world, I would say the needle is leaning in that direction more so than ever before. But I guess I didn't -- I apologize, I didn't put a lot of in-depth thought into what I said today, but I gave it some thought. You know, that's probably going to be a good starting point for what I have to say to anybody.

This is obviously a public venue today. So I mean, there is really not much else to say. I'm not a big spin guy. I'd make a terrible presidential or political candidate. I am optimistic and always have been. I was optimistic 14 years ago. The way I look at it, I've got a great job. I work with

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great people in a great place, and I saw no reason 14 years ago why we wouldn't be successful. I see no reason today why we can't be successful moving forward. It's about as simple as that.

What it comes down to is what we do here. Worse thing you can do is panic. The next probably worse thing you can do is have blinders on, and I don't think we'll do either. I really don't. So you ask the hard questions, you take a hard look at things, and have hard conversations, if necessary, and then you get to work and get things going in the right direction. It's really no different than what we tried to do after any season. You know, if there's any good thing, I guess we've had experience at it like I said in the '06-'07 reference.

The other part of that equation is it's not automatic. We're not just going to pop up and have a couple of great years. We've got to get the work done, and that is kind of where the rubber meets the road.

Q. Are Donnal and Sherff going to be available for spring ball?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, good news is they both should be full speed. Another guy, Jordan Lomax is doing great. He's a prime candidate to win the starting corner job. Tremendous young guy who had a good spring. Had surgery back in August, but he's really progressing well and doing a great job. So he'll be back. Ruben (Lile) should be ready for spring, and that is another guy that has a chance to be a good player.

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