

August 4, 2014



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. There is a rumor floating around that we're getting close here to starting which is a good thing. I want to start out welcoming Gene Taylor his first day at work. Great to have Gene and his son Jared is here also, so we're both getting started today which is a good thing, certainly.

I did the math this morning. This is my fourth media opportunity in eight days so I'm really on a roll right now. I was talked out last Monday, so it's going to be good to get going here and start doing something this evening, so we'll get it after that. Couple things of note, it's nice this year to have the tenth anniversary of the 2004 team a very special group of guys. I'm looking forward to honoring them this year.

I want to just congratulate Bruce Nelson on being selected as the ANF recipient this year. He's going up with some very prestigious players, Casey Wiegmann and Jared DeVries. It sounds like a center of controversy, but you think about Bruce Nelson, and just his career, what that award stands for, the concepts of tenacity, work ethic, character and that really sums up Bruce Nelson.

He's an outstanding player. He went from being a back-up tight end in the spring of 1989 to a guy that started four years for us, that never missed anything and just did a phenomenal job throughout his entire career. As good as Bruce was as a player, he's a better person. To me, he's really representative of what the program's all about and what that award is certainly about. I'm sure it was a very tough decision to select Bruce. There are a lot of great candidates, and it's going to be great to see Bruce recognized this season. I'm so happy about that.

This is kind of a theme this year - just being flexible. Steve alluded to that. This is the first time that I'm aware of where summer school actually ran into the preseason, so on that front we're going to have to be a little bit flexible starting today. We'll have some guys in class during the interview sessions. I'm not sure when we're going to do a team picture. It's kind of way down my list right now. We'll figure out a time here in the next couple weeks to get that done, but it is a little different.

We won't be able to practice until this evening, and that's how it's going to be all week long. The guys have finals on Friday, so we'll let them do their academic stuff until after 4:00 o'clock, and then we'll try to get our work done after 4:00 o'clock.

So we'll be on the fly there, same thing later on this year when we move into our new facility which we're extremely excited about. It's been fun to watch it go up, fun to watch everything come into place. We're not there yet, but it's really exciting. But we have a week still involved there, and we're going to try to do that in the first bye week. So our team has to be flexible that way and make that adjustment. It's like anything, it just comes down to how you approach it, what your attitude is, and we can get our work done this week and be where we need to be Saturday and the move will be the same way. Really not unlike the flood in '08 when campus got shut down and everybody lived through that and good things happened.

All that being said, we're just looking forward to getting on the field finally this evening. Getting together with the players and actually doing football. I think we made progress last spring, and I think we've had a good summer. Now the big thing is this is a very, very pivotal three weeks for our football team and for every football team in America. Camp is one time where you have your players for the most part. You have

their sole attention outside of this week, all their thoughts, all their energy should be devoted towards the team getting better. It's a great time for development. And we've got a lot of things that we're curious to learn and curious to see.

One good thing is over time things become a little bit more clear. So we're excited about the opportunity right now. It's a great opportunity, and I'm sure every coach and athlete in America feels the same way about what they're looking at. But the bottom line is we have a lot of work to do and we're here to get started with that tonight. That being said, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Who is your field goal kicker going to be this year?

COACH FERENTZ: That is one of the questions. Just on the front of who our field goal kicker is, right now I have no idea. Hopefully we'll know a little bit more here in a couple of weeks. We have some obvious openings right now at the linebacker position, corner spot, offensive line, kicker, deep snapper, both positions. That's one thing over the next three weeks hopefully we'll learn a little bit more about it.

Q. You do know who your quarterback is going to be.

COACH FERENTZ: We know who the two quarterbacks are and Jake Rudock is our starter. That's not a debatable question right now. I don't foresee that changing. It's the exact opposite of last year. We have two guys that are experienced and we have confidence. Last year neither guy was experienced. We had hopeful confidence in both guys, but it's a lot better after you watch a guy actually perform in competition. So we're happy about seeing what we saw last year. Happier about the attitude both guys have.

I think they continue to grow. They're both improvement-driven, and we thought they were better quarterbacks in the spring than they were back in January, and we'll bank on that being the case this coming month - that they'll continue to improve.

Q. You go back and look at what Desmond King did for you last year. In retrospect how amazing was that and where do you think he can take the game?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not something we foresaw even in camp. We were pleased with the way he practiced and did some good things. You just never know what a guy's going to do in game

competition. For him as a true freshman to walk in there and do what he did and perform the way he did, a very tough position, it's really admirable of him. Hopefully he'll continue to improve too. That is one good thing about young players, all players have a chance to improve. Younger guys can, I think, make more strides.

Then piggybacking on that, I think that's one of the neat things about camp. You hope there are some good stories that will emerge, be it older guys, might be a senior, might be a guy that's in his second year or it might be a true freshman. Those are things that we'll really try to keep a keen eye out for as camp goes on.

Q. What do you see at the running back position this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the challenge is something like the quarterback two years ago. We didn't know if we had a Big Ten running back on our roster. Right now I think we have four guys that we can put in the game and have confidence in. So I think the challenge for us in that regard right now is to really figure out what the smartest way to use those guys would be during the course of the season. First and foremost, hoping we can keep them healthy and have that option, have four options in each game. Plus we have a couple young guys coming up that we're eager to see more of this camp. Then as I said in Chicago, I think probably Mark Weisman. I think Mark's a really good runner and a really good football player. But it would be really better for us if we could have him fresh in the fourth quarter of every game, plus the fourth quarter of the season. We've got to be careful about that.

So I think the challenge right now is trying to utilize everybody's skills to the best way possible, and also hopefully make it a combination that's going to be good for our entire team. It's nice to have some choices and options.

Q. You have two QBs with different starters. Will they match up better against certain opponents?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure I envision it week to week that way. But, yeah, C.J. is a little bit different and offers a couple different things to his repertoire that maybe Jake does, so that's something we'll evaluate over the next three weeks. If we can get a competitive edge, we're going to try to utilize that. If not, we won't. But

that's something we've kicked around during the out of season. We'll see what happens over the next three weeks or so. But if we can find a way to maybe get a competitive edge, make it tougher for opponents to prepare, that would be a good thing.

Q. You talk about running backs, what about receivers? Do you have a core of them?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think we're healthier than we've been the last couple years. So certainly the depth is a little better at receiver position. The competition's better, which makes everybody better. Kevonte's our most experienced guy. I thought Tevaun really grew last year. Jake Hillyer grew a lot. Matt VandeBerg did a nice job as a true freshman. Hopefully we'll get Damond Powell back quickly, and we have some other guys climbing as well. Derrick Willies did a nice job as a first year player. He red-shirted last year in the spring, so hopefully it's a little deeper position than we've had in recent years.

When you have more depth that gives competition which I think makes all of them better certainly, so keep our fingers crossed there.

Q. You lost a guy to the NFL at the tight end position. What do you think of your tight end group this season?

COACH FERENTZ: Not to minimize anytime you lose an NFL-caliber player, which C.J. certainly was, that's hard to replace, but the good news is we have a good core group there. The other thing, as you know, we like to use multiple tight ends in our attack, and I don't see that changing unless we don't have enough players out there. But I think we have four guys that we have confidence in coming out of the spring. All four of those players I thought improved. Ray Hamilton is a guy, in my opinion, that is probably better than we think maybe he is. Ray's made some nice plays for us. He's done some really good things and I think we've seen him grow last spring.

Now that there is a little more opportunity out there for him, so I expect Ray to take a big step forward with the seniors on offense that we need for leadership. I think he's ready for that. He's a good football player, great young man, and right on down through Jake Duzey certainly last year, Henry had a good spring, and George did as well too. So I think we lose an outstanding player, but we have four guys that can help absorb that a little bit. It might be more committee work than one individual.

Q. Do you expect to use multiple tight ends in the game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, absolutely, unless something happens. We got in a situation in '07 where I think we threw Allen Reisner out there after his 17th birthday.

Q. Three tight ends back?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, that's something we like to do and have available if possible.

Q. Derrick Willies was a spring sensation. Did you or the coaches say anything to him to get him going?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, the coaches are continually conversing, and I've said a couple things to them too. It's not like we had to I don't think. I'm not assuming anything, but I said that in Chicago, I violated the Buckley Amendment. You look at this grade point, to be able to go 3.0 in both semesters that's a good sign for a first year player. I haven't seen anything just watching him and observing him that would indicate he's acted any differently than he did before spring practice. So good news is I don't think he's overly impressive with what he's done. He realizes he hasn't made a catch yet in a varsity game here. He hasn't played and earned a letter. I don't think he's out trying to create a brand or something like that. I think he's worried about being a good Iowa football player, and that's refreshing.

Since he's been here I've been really impressed with his attitude. I hate to say too many nice things about a young guy that hasn't done anything, but he seems focused. He seems really serious about the things he should be serious about, and that is really encouraging. The other thing that was encouraging is the way he progressed and became more consistent during the course of spring. You guys had a couple snapshots of him, but we got to watch him for 15 days, and I thought he really grew, and that's exciting.

Q. How do you replace Christian Kirksey?

COACH FERENTZ: Exactly. It's like C.J. Chris is an NFL caliber player, and the thing that's unique about Chris, he could have played all three of those spots and played them all well. Not a lot of guys can do that. He's got some unique skills that way. The other thing about Chris is he's really

a charismatic leader and brought great energy to our team in every phase, not just out there on the field. In the meeting rooms, every time you see Chris, he just had a good vibe to him. So there is a lot going on there. We lost a lot of good seniors that way, not only good players, but guys that brought a lot to the team in terms of intangibles, and that is part of the process right now.

That is part of the process of the rebuilding or replacing stage, whatever you want to call it. That's one of the challenges we have. That is a very dynamic process. The next three weeks we're going to need some more guys to emerge. We're not there yet by any stretch.

Q. When do you think you might know what you'll have in Reggie Spearman?

COACH FERENTZ: He legitimately -- he's improved every turn, every opportunity. He was a better player in the spring. But all that being said, yeah, he is young both chronologically in terms of being on campus. So he does a lot of good things. Usually for the younger guys, part of the challenge is consistency and just more conceptual understanding of what's going on. It's something players develop throughout their career, so those are the challenges. He's working hard on them, and we're really eager to see what he does here in the next three weeks.

Q. How do you feel about offseason training this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, one thing that's new this year was we were able to actually watch our guys. Imagine that, football coaches watching guys condition. It's kind of a unique concept. We were allowed to do that, which was really nice. We were also allowed to meet with them in the film room. And that is one rule that got interpreted about 130 ways based on conversations that I've been privileged to hear. So we didn't do much of that.

To me, the summer is more for Chris Doyle and his staff. But it is fun to watch them train and see how they work and handle things. I'm really pleased with the physical part. I think that's been really good. The mental part, we've got a ways to go. We're in shape right now to start practice. That part's great. Now we've got to get in football shape, but we also have to keep growing in terms of our mental toughness and chemistry, team work, all those kinds of things. We've got a lot of work to do.

Q. Do you have the confidence in Quinton Alston's ability?

COACH FERENTZ: Some guys just make you feel good. You know, two springs ago if you had asked me about Q, I would have said I had some concerns because he was just kind of doing okay out there, and okay is not good enough for a guy that is going to be playing middle linebacker. So to the point where, boy, I'm not sure where we're at here, one of those deals, and then he really flipped it around. And that was going in to two springs ago, and two springs ago he really took off. It's interesting in coaching, it's probably the same way in education, but people have different points where they just get ignited a little bit. I don't know. Pat Angerer went through the same thing and you draw an analogy.

When you see that light come on or the switch flip a little bit, it's fun. That's what we've seen now from two different springs from Q. I think last year had he not been behind three very good players, he would have played very well. I'm very confident in saying that.

I kind of feel the same way about Jordan Lomax. He was a starter, and he had an injury that took him off the field. But both those guys give you a good feeling. They worked extremely hard. They're accepting of the leadership role. They push hard out there, so we've seen a lot of good things from them in practice.

Quinton hasn't played a lot in first and second downs, so that's going to be an adjustment for him. But every player goes through it, and I think he'll handle it well. Plus he's an older, mature guy.

Q. Talk about Brandon (Scherff) a little bit?

COACH FERENTZ: He's got some really outstanding physical tools and skills. Anytime you say that, you hate to -- but he does. He's not an average guy by any stretch. But a big part of that is because he's worked so hard to develop what it is he has. I think that's where I start with Brandon. I think about his attitude, his work ethic, he's improvement driven. He's a high ethic worker-type player, and he's all about teammates and what's around him. I think that was probably a factor in him coming back for his fifth year. So those things to me are what make him good. Now you combine that with this skillset, and he's got a chance. He's already played very well for us, and he was playing

pretty well two years ago. He got injured, and handled that injury. He had a great attitude.

Last year he really was gaining ground, and I thought he was one of the better players you could find in college football a year ago. And we expect him to be a better player this year, and I think he expects that from himself. That's more important. He's already awfully good, but I think he's got a chance to be one of the best players to ever play here. I don't think that's what's driving him. He's just trying to be the best player can he be, and that's what he's focused on.

Q. You talked about how you feel about your offensive line. Now when you look at the guard spot with Jordan (Walsh), how confident are you that he will be able to take on that workload?

COACH FERENTZ: I feel really good about the four guys that have played up front. I think Andrew (Donnal) will be more comfortable out there. I think that's better suited to his skillset. Jordan Walsh really played well. He was doing good things two years ago, and he had some injuries and what have you, a little like Austin (Blythe). So Jordan really practiced well last year. He's going up against Carl Davis just about every practice frequently, which makes him a better player too. I think he's poised. Austin really made a big jump last year. I think Jordan's really poised for that kind of jump as well. Not because he's a nice kid, but he works hard at it and really takes a lot of pride in what he does. It's important to him.

So the big question right now is what do we do after that? What do we do for the final start and then develop some depth at that position.

Q. What are the challenges you have with tempering high expectations for this year with your players?

COACH FERENTZ: Expectations are expectations. Based on experience either the sky is falling or we're going to the top. The truth is it's usually somewhere in between. It's usually not quite as bad as everybody thinks it is. I'll go back a year ago, and on the flip side like a year ago, we have a lot of work to do. Right now we have a lot of questions, and I'm trying to think of a year I was here and that wasn't the case or a year in coaching that that wasn't the case. When you think you have it all set, that will change within 48 hours so just hang on a little bit.

So all of that stuff is talk, and it's kind of like the last eight days. There's been an awful lot

of talk. This is, I would say a record year for it, and we keep expanding our opportunities to talk. It's going to be fun to actually see what's going on and what we can do. Bottom line is how we play this year is going to be determined by what we do on the field, how we react to different situations and those kinds of things.

So, you know, landscape can change fast. There is a lot of geography that you can cover from the end of this month let alone the end of the season. So we'll take it a day at a time and see what we can do with it.

Q. John Lowdermilk is a veteran in your secondary. In terms of experience and age, do you expect him to become kind of a guru or leader of that secondary? Can he develop into a vocal leader that you'll need?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure vocal is John's style. But he's a guy that's played well. He's played well on special teams. Did a good job last year. So we're really counting on him. Players have to do things within their own personality. But the way he plays, his attitude and his effort on the practice field, et cetera, all those things are going to help make him be a logical leader on the defense that he needs to be. He needs to accept that. But I also think Jordan's (Lomax) going to help back there too. I know he didn't play a lot last year due to that injury, but he was fully engaged. I just think it's going to be a good combination. It may take a while for those guys to get a fit in and what have you, but it's good to be strong up the middle. We have an opportunity. We're not there yet, but we have an opportunity, and hopefully it's a tandem effort.

Q. Overall, what would be your biggest question mark right now?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, you know, first of all, just replacing the starters. Figuring out that equation, and the placekicking. Going back to the first question. The placekicking is a big question mark now. We just don't know. It could well be Marshall Koehn. It wouldn't surprise me in the least. But we need to develop consistency at that position, the competition there should be healthy. But all those positions are critical. Then just to see how the team really continues to come together and grow, how we handle all the ups and downs and those things that are part of the preseason.

Q. Coach, what did you take away from Big Ten media day with Rutgers and Maryland? What do you think about their programs and them competing in the Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, expansion has just been kind of part of our lives for a while now. If it hasn't been discussed, expansion has been going on. It's a sign of the times. It's college athletics right now. Certainly things are very different than they used to be. Quite frankly, I haven't thought a lot about it. I spent a day in Des Moines and talked to several people. I've talked to several people since then that have marked on their calendar the Maryland trip. It was kind of curious to me.

What I learned was this is an historic thing, so I think that's why the people are focused on it. The fans that are traveling out there. It was a nice, nice chance to dove tail with a unique part of the country, Washington, D.C. being right there, and Ravens happen to be playing on Sunday right after it as well.

So bottom line is it is different. It's kind of strange. I don't think we can go to Rutgers here it seems for like a decade, but that part you have to navigate. But it's going to be a new chapter. I'm really enthused about the east-west part of things. I think that makes an awful lot of sense. I hope our fans are enthused. That's a good thing too. So we have great leadership in the conference, but it's an historic period, certainly. But at the end of the day, what it boils down to us is we're going to play 12 games. That is one thing we're guaranteed. No matter who they are, we have to be at our best in all 12.

Q. Iowa has gotten some good players out of Maryland and New Jersey over the past few years. How will the addition of Maryland and Rutgers help you take advantage of that in recruiting?

COACH FERENTZ: On the initial front I was kind of concerned about that. I thought it might play to their advantage. But I've given it a little bit more thought, and I'm not so sure it's not a good thing for us. It just makes the Big Ten more -- people out there more comfortable with it and more knowledgeable about it. The trick for us is to get players or prospects to come out to campus and spend time here. If we can get that achieved, which I think this might help us even more, then at least you're in the fight and it gives you a better chance. So hopefully it will be a good thing for us.

Q. Going back to special teams, I know you had Jordan (Canzeri) returning kicks for you. With Jordan, if he takes on a bigger role, do you still intend to use him as a kick returner?

COACH FERENTZ: We're open on everything right now in the return game. Basically every position right now is up for grabs. So, yeah, that's something we'll talk about and look at and see how things go. But we're still open to anybody returning kicks or punts.

Q. When you have a lot of inexperience at one position like you had this year, do you do anything special to sort of shorten the learning curve or do you just do what you do and let them sort of learn?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a good question. It's true of every position. You can only ask your players to do what they can do. You're always trying to encourage growth certainly. So the most critical position there is the quarterback position, if you will at the linebacker spot and middle linebacker, Quinton has been functioning, I don't think that's going to be an issue for him at all. He's a little like a free center or safety making calls. So I don't think that's going to be an issue, but if it is, you don't want to beat yourself before the ball snap. It all starts there. But I don't anticipate that being an issue. I think we're okay there.

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