

November 6, 2007



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: I'll start out with injuries real quickly. Adam Shada will not be playing this week I don't think, and my guess is Pat Angerer won't, also. Both those guys hopefully will have a chance a week from now. We'll see how that goes. Chad Geary didn't play last Saturday obviously, and that one is up in the air, probably another week would be my guess.

The only other development there, I think Devan Moylan right now, we're probably looking at petitioning hopefully for a sixth year with him. He missed last year, he's going to have a hard time, I think, getting back this year. So we're going to try to petition for a sixth year. I'm no expert on that, but based on the league rate case when we tried to get his sixth year, it sounded like if a guy has got two demonstrated years of problems, which Devan certainly does the last two years, hopefully he'll be able to get a sixth. So that's where we're at on that one.

Captains for this week, we'll go with Tom Busch again, Albert Young, and then on the defense we'll go with Mike Humpal and Bryan Mattison. Obviously again last week it was a good win for our football team. We were pleased to get the win. The ride home was a lot better than it was two years ago to say the least. So we're happy about that.

We're eager to be back home in Kinnick this week, and another Big Ten ballgame. We're playing a Minnesota football team that I'm sure would like to have a better record. But we look at them on tape, they're competing real hard, they're playing hard and competing well, and a lot like us, they've got a lot of older guys playing, they've got a lot of younger guys playing, too. Bottom line is it's probably a pretty good match-up and a tough rivalry game, a Big Ten game. So that's how we're looking at it. We're having a great week and hopefully make some progress and improvement.

Q. You've been able to diagnose this team pretty well week to week. It really seems like you put the finger on where they needed to -- consequently that's about where you figured they'd be?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've had a lot of turns on the road certainly during the year. Two things I think that have been consistent, are inconsistency in areas, and the other thing is our attitude has been really good. I've said that all along, and I think that starts with the older guys.

But yeah, it's been an interesting year. We've had a lot of moving parts. That's part of the deal. But again, I think the thing that's really carried us and given us a chance particularly this past month would be the attitude. That hasn't wavered. We haven't had any changes there. If anything it's gotten stronger. Our older guys are really doing a good job there. I'm very appreciative of that. All the coaches are appreciative of it.

Q. Did the attitude turn last year? Has it been a lot better this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I've said it many times. I just think that started getting better in December. I think we just maybe adjusted the way we all think, and to me that's when it all began. So you really have to give last year's seniors credit, otherwise I don't think that we would have been able to compete in the Bowl game. It's been ongoing since that time.

But certainly this group of seniors and then underclassmen, too, have jumped in there and really done a nice job since we got going back in January. It's been very consistent. That's one thing that's been consistent. Our performance has been anything but, but the guys' work ethic and attitude has been really good.

Q. Anybody tape your halftime speech?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so, no.

Q. Ready to start maybe yelling at the guys before the game to go along with the theme?

COACH FERENTZ: That's really overrated, I think. For whatever reason, we

haven't been able to get off to a good start the last couple weeks, and Kevin Foor (equipment manager) mentioned in the locker room after the game, he thought maybe we'd just ship our equipment up to the hotel and go out in the parking lot for a half hour and maybe scrimmage or something like that before we got on the bus and came down. That might be the best idea I've heard recently.

It's under consideration right now, except we'd probably get somebody hurt based on the way things are going. I don't know if we want to do that. But we're trying to find something to get going here a little bit earlier.

Q. Damian at the end of the game seemed to really have a lot of spark.

COACH FERENTZ: He did. He came in and did a good job. Albert has been running real well, and Damian came in -- again, we were fortunate there because we thought a week before that he might have a hard time playing. That is one good break, we actually caught a couple, but he showed up Tuesday and practiced pretty well Tuesday, was really good on Wednesday. So that was a big bonus.

And then getting Mike Humpal back, that was a break, too, that I wasn't anticipating. So we have caught a couple breaks, and I think you're right, Damian came in. Sometimes it just happens where a guy comes in and makes a couple good plays. Albert made a great run on the touchdown I guess it was in the third quarter, and it worked out right. Those guys are really complementing each other well. Tom Busch continued to do a great job up in front of those guys.

Q. On paper it seems this year you've either run the ball really well or passed the ball really well. At this point are you just -- obviously you want balance, but are you just taking whatever you get?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, philosophically we want to be balanced, but we're just happy if we can score points anyway possible. We're not going to be too choosy right now.

It just unfolded that way. They kind of played us Saturday in a way that made it a little bit tougher to run the football. No huge surprise, they had done that a little bit against Michigan. They had done a nice job against Michigan's rush game. So the passes were there at times, and fortunately we did a good job, especially in the second half, of doing a little better job completing some passes and doing some things there.

You know, you have to do whatever is out there, and again, we're not built right now where we can really dictate to the defense unfortunately.

Q. Is this a team that you hope to be able to dictate what your offense can do?

COACH FERENTZ: It's an interesting match-up. Our strength right now is on defense and theirs is on offense. Their offensive football team is really moving the ball well. They're scoring points and doing a good job. The quarterback is playing well for them, young guys playing very, very well, both running and passing. So that's probably the strength of their team right now, and that's where they're more experienced is on that side of the ball. And conversely our defensive guys, the same boat.

Then when you flip it over, they're playing some young guys defensively right now just like we're playing young guys offensively. They've got a lot of experience, they've just got some guys in different positions and what have you. So it's going to be an interesting thing. I think the way we're built right now, it's fair to say we'll be unpredictable again for two more weeks, certainly this week.

Q. How big a victory would it be to get to a Bowl?

COACH FERENTZ: It would be great, but that's way down the road right now for us. Right now I'd be really happy just to win this week. That being said, I think it's cliché -- we talk about rivalry games, but also I think if you look at us hard, you guys have watched us play enough to know it's going to be a challenge for us. Hopefully we're smart enough to know that. That's just the way we are right now. We're going to have to work extremely hard Saturday to hope to get a win.

If we can get there, then we'll worry about the next bridge when it's in front of us. Right now we just need to try to win this game and see what happens.

Q. You lost your first two rivalry games this year, the trophy games. Does that make this one a little bit more important?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the atrium is a little vacant up there right now. If you walk through there, there's plenty of room to sit down. It would be nice for that reason certainly. You want to win all your trophies -- you want to win every game you're involved with, trophies or no trophies.

I've told this story probably every year, I never knew what Floyd meant until 1981 until

those guys came across the field. I didn't know what the heck they were doing. All of a sudden there were a bunch of guys sprinting over to our bench. That's when I learned what that meant.

So anybody that's been involved in a game like this, and it's probably true of every rivalry game, it means something. You don't want to give that up. We lost -- last week they earned him, we lost him, and now we've got to try to get it back.

Q. In this day and age is it a good idea to have players rushing to the other sidelines, grabbing the trophy?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I haven't thought about it. It might be a good topic for somebody to think about, putting the trophy in a holding tank or something like that and then bringing it to the locker room afterwards. That's probably a -- seriously, that's probably a good idea. No, I don't think it's necessarily healthy. I don't think it was healthy in 1981. You know that line in the movie "Ghostbusters"? "We're trying to study the effectiveness." I'll tell you what the effect is. That's what the effect of that whole thing is. It's the same thing, which is probably not what you're trying to achieve after any game.

Q. Sportsmanship and all that, you have Big Ten commercials about all that, it's basically a big wag of the finger to the other side?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it kind of is. That would be a good call.

Q. Should fans come out onto the field?

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't thought much about it.

Q. Your fans come out on the field. I guarantee you if --

COACH FERENTZ: I can understand why. Yeah, I mean, it's a concern. I mean, back in '81, my first game here was Nebraska, and they came out that day for obvious reasons. They came out. I learned real quick, you stand right on the edge of the stadium and walk right around the edge and all is fine. But if you're out there in the middle, it's a little bit scary and things could happen.

Q. I presume it was a big deal back in 1981.

COACH FERENTZ: You're saying all these other ones haven't been big? They've been big for us. But I know what you're saying and I get

your point. I'm not in a real philosophical mood right now, but that's a valid point.

Q. Along the same line, they were saying something about fining schools like SIU Chicago are doing?

COACH FERENTZ: Not to my knowledge, and I wasn't even aware the southeast was doing it. That's probably what it would take. I thought we were pretty good having collapsable goal posts. I thought that was pretty smart.

Q. Are there specific areas of Minnesota's defense you guys think you might be able to exploit?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm only laughing because the thought of us exploiting someone is a little bit amusing. They're looking at us saying, boy, look at those stats.

I'm not trying to be smart, but if you look at us offensively, we're not a stat team, they're not a stat team defensively at this point. Our whole thing is going to be trying to match up and execute. That's really where we're at. We need to play better.

I mean, that's -- it gets back to some topics earlier in the season. Our whole thing right now is execution and consistency. When we execute with some consistency, we move the ball okay. We're not a bad football team.

We've had a lot of close calls, but close calls don't get you where they want to go, so they don't get you any points. That's the challenge that's ahead for us right now. I think flipping it around they're fighting the same battle. They're trying to get a little bit more consistent with some things. It's amazing; the run game, for instance, they'll be playing very well and then they'll give up a couple of long runs. Michigan hit a couple long ones on them, otherwise they were playing pretty well.

We've been down that road, too, defensively. That's usually the case. You go into the meeting the next day saying, other than those three runs we really did a nice job. But you can't dismiss those three runs. So the challenge for us is to try to manufacture those runs and get something going. That's kind of where we're both at, I think.

Q. Saturday you kind of gave -- when Jake missed a couple what some would call easy throws, you kind of gave Jake a pat on the butt on the sidelines. Is he a guy that responds a lot better to positive encouragement than

yelling?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's pretty hard on himself. I think he's very -- he's not -- he's pretty realistic about his performance, and I think -- probably maybe a little critical. But there have been times we'll give a guy a pat and maybe whisper something to him, also. He's working his tail off to get it done. That was one of the greatest things that happened, I think, Saturday, it was good to see him have success. We talked about the team having success, but he made some good throws Saturday that really got us going, and that's -- down the road that's what we're looking for.

Q. You said a couple weeks ago there was a date when the team hit rock bottom. Is there a similar date when things got turned around?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll talk about that afterward. We're not there yet. We're still working right now. Yeah, I've got some dates in my mind about everything, but again, this one is an open book right now. We're trying to finish the season.

Q. Did it help that on the hitch-and-go route that you asked Jake to throw it basically to a spot that was pretty safe, a pretty safe throw, and did that maybe -- that sort of sparse confidence in him, maybe what you asked him to do, compared to what you had asked him to do previously?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about that, but I'll say this. We haven't necessarily completed a lot of long balls, in practice or certainly in games. I go back to the Michigan State one, maybe not the same as, but kind of like, we had that near miss to Cleveland I believe it was down the middle. That's kind of been us. We're off by six inches, and if you start making some of those completions -- you can miss a throw off the sidelines just as easily as that one to James. But if you can complete those passes, boy, it just opens things up for you a little bit.

Again, it's not always the quarterback. It's the speed of the receivers, running those routes in practice and carrying it over to a game so the quarterback can kind of know this is where it's going to be. It's an age-old problem, getting the guys to run the same route on Wednesday as they do on Saturday. That's how you establish timing and accuracy.

So it all goes together, and then the protection has got to be there, too, so the guy can set his feet and get the ball the way he wants to

instead of shoving off his back foot or something like that. All that stuff affects things.

Q. Have you or Ken ever suggested to Jake that he take a little something off his throws at times?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, you're probably referring to that first 3rd down. Yeah, that was smoking pretty good. The way I look at it, it's the receiver's job to catch a ball.

Obviously it all goes back to my days as a younger person, but like Terry Bradshaw, when he came into the league, I don't know if you ever saw the -- you guys ever watch the Munsters, where Herman Munster went out for the Dodgers, they had him on the Dodgers, I think, and the whole team quit because he kept throwing the ball so hard. That was Terry Bradshaw as a rookie. It didn't matter what the pass was, it was all the same speed, 100 miles an hour.

Some passes are touch passes, other ones you've got to throw the football. If you're a receiver, that's why a receiver is called a receiver, because they receive the ball. That's the way I look at it, so you've got to catch it.

Q. Can you elaborate a little bit on your secondary and how they've progressed throughout the season to where they're at right now?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, they've been playing pretty well. We got off to a slow start the other day, but we've got moving parts back there, too. Probably the only two constants all season long have been Harold Dalton and Charles Godfrey out on the outside, Brett Greenwood has jumped in there and done a nice job with Devan going out at Wisconsin. He was learning, and I think he's gotten better every week. He's obviously come up with some big plays for us.

Bradley Fletcher jumped in and did a nice job starting two weeks ago when he got called in against Michigan State. Played well last week. Those guys continue to work hard, and they're doing a pretty good job back there, and the underneath coverage I think has been better, too.

Certainly Humpal had a couple picks. Klink would have had one the other day, too, maybe, if he had two hands to use. But I think we're doing some better things. We're not out of the woods.

Q. Back to the reserves that have come in, are you sure that's their work ethic during practice because you don't ever expect injury

to occur so they come in extra pumped?

COACH FERENTZ: That's really been the story of our team this year. We've had guys in every phase, secondary, up front, linebackers, we've had a lot of guys jump in and make contributions. It's been painful at times, but that's part of the first time out there, and more subtle areas, too.

Our punt protection team, our punt team, we've got a lot of moving parts there, too, if you go from August until now. Guys are doing a good job. We're starting to run out of parts. In some areas we're getting a little threadbare, a couple of our special teams that hopefully we can hold the line where we're at now so it's not too noticeable and we don't start paying a price. You can only dip so far, and I think we're at that point where we're dipping pretty far into it.

Q. In that regard, Clayborn and Ballard have helped out.

COACH FERENTZ: They really have. The last couple weeks you've just watched these guys grow. We're seeing them practice, and most importantly you see it on the field. They're having some success, but they're earning it. It's not like somebody is laying down for them. They're earning it out there. I think that creates more success in both their minds. It's coming at a great time because really our defensive team has played enough the last three weeks prior to -- they've played about four games in three weeks' time, so starting to get some contributions from younger guys is really helpful.

Q. Do you get more comfortable with Ballard and Clayborn as the season -- as you see them in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I said on the the teleconference, earlier, Adrian is probably the best example I can give you. He was a guy that last December I commented about him, I think, Brandon Myers, really having good Decembers. And then he had kind of a quiet spring and then pretty much disappeared. He was in the witness protection program in August. We couldn't locate him. But he was out there, but it was like he's out there but you never notice the guy. And then all of a sudden he started climbing up again. I think that's just youth. It's like you see something in a guy, but it's not coming out full percent, full way.

And Ballard, he's been doing pretty well. Back in August I'm not sure he knew if he was in Lawrence, Kansas, where he grew up, not because of the University but where he grew up, or Iowa City. He was just out there trying to find his

way around. But he's really making some progress, so it's good to see. And obviously guys that have a little more success, they get more into it, too, which is good, good for the conference.

Q. That opens up for packages for you too?

COACH FERENTZ: We're able to move the guys around a little bit, and that's been good. It's giving some of those other guys a break. Mattison moves inside a little bit and gives Mitch a break because he's gotten a lot of snaps this year. It just gives us a little flexibility. Chad Geary was coming along, too, we were pleased with his progress and he got hurt a couple weeks ago. But we'll get him back and he'll help us out, too. So that's good.

Q. How much of a defensive player or tight end was he coming out of high school, Ballard?

COACH FERENTZ: Quite honestly, I can say this now because I think he's found a home. We thought he had a chance at tight end, realistic chance; the guy is a good athlete. But we were pretty confident if that didn't work, he could probably play defense. And if that didn't work, there's always offensive tackle. That's not a bad spot to be if you're a big athlete. But yeah, I think he's found a home. I don't think he's stopped -- destination B I think is his home destination right now. I don't see that changing. That's a good thing.

Q. Was he willing to move?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, because the tight ends have to run a little faster than the linemen. It didn't take him long to figure that one out; geez, 280 pounds, maybe I should be a lineman.

Q. With the way the early part of the season unfolded, have you sensed a sense of urgency from some of your seniors the last few weeks that they just didn't really want to go out with a losing year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they've been that way the whole way through. I don't think anything has changed. Their resolve has been really good. They never wavered, haven't wavered. Good or bad, they've been the same. And I think that's what makes them a good group. They've been straight through all the way through this thing. And they were good in December, too, obviously. It wasn't just our seniors, the guys that

were juniors last year. So they've been strong. I was saying that even though we were getting our butts kicked pretty good. The thing obviously is it was a group that was staying positive and they were working hard. Certain things you can't control, but that you can, and if you're doing that right, then maybe something good will happen. We've got a couple weeks where it hasn't, but it hasn't been easy, and it won't be easy.

Q. Back to that secondary for a moment, coming out of Des Moines, Bernstein was quite a heralded player, and now he's getting time.

COACH FERENTZ: He's doing a good job. We're really very pleased. He's working hard, he's a good listener, a good learner, and he's been competitive out there. We recruited him -- I'm not saying he's just line Andy Brodell, but it was similar -- we thought he could be a DB, but really we weren't sure.

I think probably as impressive as anything he did in high school was run the football, play offense. And that's where the parallel to Andy was. But we didn't think Jordan was necessarily the back Andy was. Andy found a home at receiver, I think Jordan has found one, too. I think he's in the right spot. He may end up being a return guy for us, too. I can't remember what game that was, Purdue, I think he filled in and did a pretty good job. We're really pleased. He's doing a good job, good learner.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....