

September 21, 2013



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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: We're certainly pleased to get the victory today and just happy for our players. They've worked extremely hard during the week. They played hard today. I thought they came to the stadium ready to go and did a lot of good things.

The obvious, it was a very strange game, statistically and the whole nine yards, but the big thing obviously is the big plays that we made, special teams wise, defensively, so that was great to see. Obviously a nice job by Kevonte and B.J. but also guys working to help on the returns. That was a real good thing.

Damond Powell got his feet wet a little bit, made a couple plays, which was good, and that'll be good for him, and making the play on that kick return was a pretty impressive, too. A lot of good things, and certainly some things we'll have to coach tomorrow and correct those, but we'll get to that tomorrow.

Q. Can you talk about the depth? You were able to get a lot of guys action, building depth, how important this game was for that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's just been so long since we've had a chance to get guys in a game and actually let them play, so I think that's going to help. We're trying to work hard with those guys in practice and get them some extra work, but there's no substitute for being out there in front of a crowd and having to do some things, so that's good.

Everybody should be happy we got our backup quarterback in, so that bodes well for the

future, right? Weisman only had 10 carries, so it was a double-double victory this week.

Q. You had four running backs with 10-plus carries. Canzeri still working his way back, some young freshmen. How do you feel about getting those guys carries?

COACH FERENTZ: It's just all good, and unfortunately the downside is we had a couple turnovers from two guys that haven't played a lot, but they're quality guys, they practice really well and they're doing a good job, so I think sometimes you have to go through that to learn, and I'm confident in both LeShun and Jordan will learn from their experiences today. But they did some good things, too. They ran the ball well, and the one LeShun fumbled, that was a good run until the ball came out. He was just trying to make yards.

But you can't -- there's no substitute for experience, so that's really a big plus today.

Q. The punt returns, it looked like it was diagrammed on the board.

COACH FERENTZ: Chris and the staff did a great job with all the special teams today, and that's one thing we knew that they rugby punted or else the end-over-end deal, and the trick on the rugby punts is to field them. If you can field them cleanly, you're going to have a chance because the ball doesn't get up in the air too high, but it's easier said than done. So Kevonte did a great job fielding both of those. We had the one mishap there with Riley where he's backing up and should have just let the ball go. But it also takes the other 10 guys working hard, and I don't know if we were 10-for-10 but at least a lot of guys were out there hustling on those.

Q. Second week in a row that you got a touchdown scored (inaudible) but he got yards after a catch doing so. Are you noticing more confidence in him now?

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COACH FERENTZ: I think that's the same thing I'm talking about with some of the other guys, absolutely, and that's a great point. But for him to have back-to-back weeks like that, that's a positive. It's one thing to do it in practice. That's where it all starts. But then to carry it into a game, that's a good thing. We haven't had an abundance of those, either, so that's really encouraging for us.

Q. How about three catches I think for 132 yards. Are you starting to see now what you envisioned?

COACH FERENTZ: He's been doing better in practice. A lot to learn, but he's a high energy guy. I think you talked to him today. He's just a high energy guy, just one of those guys that makes you feel good. This will be good for his confidence to actually be out there in Kinnick and do something instead of just trotting out there with the team wanting a shot. It's a positive for sure.

Q. Talk about the way your defense performed out there today.

COACH FERENTZ: I think that really as much as anything, we got off to a good fast start defensively. I'm not sure it was every series in the first half, but it seemed like we were three-and-out and we had really good field position as a result of that and then we weren't able to capitalize, unfortunately.

But they seemed like they were on task. I thought they disrupted the quarterback pretty well. We loss contained a few times, got to work on that, but at least we weren't letting him set his feet all day. It looked like we were playing pretty physically, too, when they were completing passes. A lot of positives.

Q. You had a guy return two interceptions for touchdowns. That's kind of unusual.

COACH FERENTZ: Just good coaching there, obviously. It's just one of those things. You can't explain that. To have four touchdowns, non-offensive touchdowns in a game, that's pretty hard to explain. I hope we didn't use them all up. But it's good to see that, too. We haven't had an abundance of big plays offensively or special teams-wise where we've reversed it and scored points, and that was great to see.

Q. Is the key not to get too high off this win?

COACH FERENTZ: We're still 3-1, and we have a lot of work to do. It's going to be that way for a long time. I've been saying, our older guys are really doing a good job, I think, of leading. They've done that since really the end of November, and I think we're getting more guys to come along with them and maybe model what they're doing.

I thought we had a good week of practice. This is our best three days of work on the practice field this past week, so that was encouraging.

And that was something we tried to encourage them to do, just do a little bit better, and then certainly be a little bit more game-ready and keep our concentration out there during the course of the game.

You know, it's a positive that way, but we start again new tomorrow and we'll have a big challenge on our hand. We haven't done much up there in Minneapolis in a couple years, so we'll have a big challenge on our hands.

Q. The last couple of weeks Jake really has shown a knack to extend plays. Is the game slowing down for him now?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's just doing a really good job. I don't know what to credit it to. Greg has done a great job with him. But he does a lot of great work on his own, and he just seems to make good decisions out there on the field. Just has a good awareness and a good common sense player, and he's not afraid to pull it down and use his feet. That's a big benefit if you've got a guy that can do that and make those yards when things are covered up down in the back end, that type of deal. Just really pleased with what he's doing, and a time or two I wish he'd get on the ground a little quicker. I don't like it when they're standing up taking shots.

Q. Do you see Ray getting in the mix?

COACH FERENTZ: Ray is just an uncanny guy. You talk about Damond Powell, Ray has got a good energy to him, too, on the practice field and certainly on the game field. He just has a knack of getting himself open, and when the ball is in his area he seems to come up with it no matter what. Took a couple shots today but he bounces right back up and keeps on playing, so it's good to see him being involved again.

Q. What's the confidence level now,

three-game win streak, a dominating performance like today, heading into conference play?

COACH FERENTZ: We're pleased with the win, don't get me wrong, but I think everybody realizes we're still very much a work in progress, but I think we improved today. There's no question I felt better today than I did two weeks ago sitting here. We're on the right track, but it's day-to-day, week-to-week, and I know our older guys understand that. We understand how important it is that we keep trying to improve. You look at us historically, we've had good teams in November or beyond that. Usually we're doing the right things in October and late September.

That's our challenge right now. We've got to keep our foot on the gas. We'll enjoy this game, but tomorrow we'll get back to work.

Q. Tanner Miller had an interception. He seemed to bait the quarterback a little bit.

COACH FERENTZ: It kind of seemed that way from the sideline, and I think he had that thing sized up pretty good. Seems to be his lucky end zone down there, but those are big plays, just invaluable.

Q. Good tackler, too.

COACH FERENTZ: He is. He came up and made a very nice play on one of those balls in particular over the middle. He's been wired in really since the spring. I think he had a really good spring practice. He and B.J. really did a nice job, and he's been playing well each and every game we've had so far, and his sidekick there John Lowdermilk is climbing the ladder, too, so he's a lot more confident player than he was four weeks ago.

Q. As a head coach is this the kind of game you want going into Big Ten play?

COACH FERENTZ: You don't get a choice. I'd much rather have this than last year's Game 4. We tried that one. That wasn't such a good idea. We wanted to win today. Any time we're playing we want to win. We got that done, and the fact that other guys got to play today and we did some good things, that's good, but there's going to be a lot to correct tomorrow, I know that.

Q. B.J. Lowery had two interceptions for touchdowns. Last week he had one of the great interceptions of all time.

COACH FERENTZ: He's a good football player. I just mentioned Tanner having a good

spring. I don't know if anybody had a better spring than B.J., and Conor wasn't that far behind. Those are three guys that just come to mind right away. I keep talking about our seniors. I think that's one thing, whether it be Tanner, B.J., those linebackers, Van Sloten, the guys that are seniors, they practice the way you're supposed to practice, and they did it all spring.

You expect guys to get better when they practice well, and I think B.J. is probably an example of that. For us to be a good team we need our best guys playing their best, and I think they're doing that, or at least they're trying to.

Q. (Inaudible) what did he show you that he's wanting to get in?

COACH FERENTZ: He's been doing a good job really since camp began. It's kind of a two-part thing; it's assessing what he's doing and also assessing what our team looks like, and I think we're all pretty much convinced that he could really help us out on special teams. If we'd get him get involved there, he could do that for us, and we felt like we needed a little bit more octane there in hopes of taking maybe some of the pressure off some of the guys we've been using, our starters.

And then looking down the road here, we feel like he's got an excellent opportunity. We've got three senior linebackers. I think he's got an excellent opportunity to be right in the thick of things there at one of those three spots. So I don't see much downside here. I think it's just a matter of trying to utilize what he can bring for this year and then hopefully he may be playing later this year. You never know how the season goes. We're trying to win today and we've also got an eye to the future, but I think in his case it's a win-win situation.

Q. Do you ever have to remind yourself that he's just turning 17?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's on that young side for sure. I don't know who's younger, him or Bulaga. At this point Brian was kind of the same way. Bryan was the youngest guy ever to start in the Super Bowl. It's unusual sometimes, they're both from Chicago. It's kind of one of those weird deals. But he doesn't act that way on the field. He's carrying his weight out there pretty well and doing a good job.

Q. You've said many times words to

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the effect that there's no bad win, but does having a big win, a convincing win, do something extra for a program?

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, it gives us a chance to play some guys who really deserve to get in there and play. That's good. I don't see a lot of downside in this case unless somebody gets hurt. There's some sloppy things out there that -- we had a couple penalties and the turnovers, but the turnovers I can live with a little bit better. The penalties, we've got to clean those up.

But up until it got out of hand I think we were playing pretty clean that way. I don't see a lot of downside, but you never know when that's going to happen. We certainly didn't see this coming today. It's just one of those you get four non-offensive touchdowns it's kind of one of those freak games.

Q. You guys only allowed Western Michigan to convert on one 3rd down. How important is it for you guys to get the defense off the field and get back to pounding the ball in?

COACH FERENTZ: Getting off the field is always a good thing, and that's our number one goal. No matter where the defense goes on the field we want to get them off as fast as possible. So that's huge.

We're not trying to possess the ball, it's not like our goal. We're trying to score points, move the ball and score points, but if you can burn some clock, too, that's not a bad thing, but especially if you get a lead. But we're just playing it out. But the defense really did a good job today of getting off the field.

Q. It looked like they were giving you some really good chances to take advantage of their punts just by the way even the coverage was fanning out. Was that something you guys looked at on tape and said you could take a chance here?

COACH FERENTZ: Our thinking was with the rugby punts, it's about fielding the ball. If you can't field them, which is the intent, it just makes it tough, and those things will roll. But if we could field the thing, we felt like we felt like we might have an opportunity. It still required the guys blocking, and they blocked hard. It was a team thing, and Kevonte did a really nice job once he got that ball.

Q. How has the team changed or grown since the first game against Northern Illinois to a dominant win like today?

COACH FERENTZ: All four games have been a little bit different, but the big thing is I think we're growing. I think we're certainly a better team than we were two weeks ago, and we probably weren't as good in week two as we were in week one, ironically. We lost one game and won the other. But week two was a little disappointing because in a lot of ways we stepped backward in my opinion. At least we're back on the right track right now, and that game also served as a reminder that we're capable of going in reverse, too, and that's not what we're trying to do.

All in all we'd rather be 4-0 obviously, but I think we're doing a lot of good things, and the potential is there for us to put a team together, but we've still got a lot of work to do.

Q. What does it do for your offense to make the big plays you made today on the résumé? What can that do for you?

COACH FERENTZ: Anytime you have a good, big play offensively, that's a positive. To get some guys involved, Damon, he may have had some catches prior to this, I can't really remember. But for him to catch the ball in stride today, that was a good thing. The quarterbacks did a good job of getting it to him, and he brought it in. Those are positives, and that's a play we couldn't make in that first ballgame. We took a shot down the field on a 3rd and 1 and came up short.

It's good stuff. It's not automatic, but you've got to hit them in practice first and then you've got to do it on Saturday.

Q. Kevonte, I hate to say this, he looked faster today than he ever has.

COACH FERENTZ: Part of that might be confidence. I wouldn't disagree with you. And that's, again, confidence and experience. I think also confidence in his teammates that they're going to be working hard for him. It's a good combination.

Q. With how punt returns work, everybody goes back to the guy who scores and says, hey, did you see my block?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I imagine everybody took credit for it, like anything good that happens.

Q. Things change schedule wise real fast, don't they?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're in Big Ten play now. That's how it is every year. Not that these games don't count, but everybody is -- outside of one team, everybody is going to start out with zero losses next week. You know, that's another advantage, I guess, or one of the exciting things about being involved in conference play.

But every game is significant certainly, and now we've got a challenge of starting conference play and going to a place where we haven't played extremely well in the last couple trips.

Q. Kevonte was only 17 yards from breaking Nile Kinnick's record for punt returns. Were you guys aware on the sidelines of what he had done today?

COACH FERENTZ: I heard that in the fourth quarter. With all due respect to Kevonte, I love the guy, he's a great young man, I think it's okay if that one stayed right where it's at. Not that we would have held him back, but maybe would have thought about it, actually. That's one that needs to stay. I hope we press it again, though.

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