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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Just following up on John Campbell. John's just such a tremendous guy, so I certainly want to wish him all the best. I didn't realize until just now, Steve told me he had made that official. Our best to John. I've got a lot of respect for him certainly.

Steve alluded to the ANF, this is ANF game, and for Casey Wiegmann to be honored this week is more than fitting. What a tremendous human being, obviously had a tremendous career in the National Football League and great career at Iowa. It's really neat that he'll be back and we'll have a lot of great people here in town this weekend. That will be a nice thing, nice occasion.

Captain-wise we have the same four guys this week, James Vandenberg, James Ferentz offensively, and I got James Morris and Chris Kirksey on the defensive side. Really happy to get the win and nice to see Mike Meyer and Anthony Hitchens recognized by several organizations.

So happy for those guys. We flip the page on Monday and get another really big challenge on our hands this weekend. Penn State comes into town, and they have won four straight games, as I know you know, and they are really playing well in all phases.

So it's going to be another challenge for us, and you know, we'll turn our sites to starting our preparation this afternoon. We have got a lot of work to do.

Q. Can we get an update on Weisman and his sprained ankle?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they did an MRI yesterday so that's positive, at least there's nothing overly concerning based on that but all that being said, he does have a sprained ankle and he

will maybe do some light work here the next couple days. See where he's at Thursday.

But I think realistically, you're talking about a guy trying to be a running back, not a guy doing something otherwise, and you know, I think he would have a lot of progress to make to be able to play, so we'll just have to take the mental approach. He's not going to be here, if he does join us, it will be great.

Q. It's not a high ankle sprain?

COACH FERENTZ: I've heard high, low, in between, and all I know is he's out of the boot and they are going to let him work today a little bit, jogging around, starts, as opposed to trying to run against an angry group -- this is the varsity we are playing this week so it's a whole different deal. This group is really good on defense.

Q. We were led to believe that Bullock would play last week. What's the story there?

COACH FERENTZ: Needless to say he didn't play. And I was optimistic last Tuesday when I said -- doesn't look like he'll play this week. We're in a real gray area issue. It's not a black and white thing. It's not like a broken bone. When he's cleared medically, hopefully we'll have him. He was cleared last Tuesday when I was here, but if you have reoccurring complications or symptoms, however you want to describe it, he wasn't cleared.

Q. What were some of the positives that came out of the film review?

COACH FERENTZ: We did a lot of good things but there are a lot of things we can do better hopefully. But the biggest thing is that we played 60-plus minutes the way you have to play. It was a tough game, really very physical game on both sides, and you know, they are a very tough outfit.

So the biggest thing I think is that our guys hung in there and persevered and found a way to get the job done at the end, and to do it on the

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road is good, too, because it's really -- I haven't gone back and looked but you probably have to go back to 2009 to look at us playing like that on the road and coming out of a tough environment against a tough team with a victory like that. Hopefully it will be good for our confidence and maybe we can take some steps forward.

Q. Will Canzeri be considered to play on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: We have a very limited pool of guys right now so I think it's that realistic to think that he's thick into it and it's good news. I just said that on the Big Ten radio thing, that's the good news. I'm using it in some ways -- like, okay, the calvary is coming. He's played one game and I forget how many snaps he's taken or carries. They were tough carries. But at least he's played. He's been tackled at the Division I level, so that's a positive and he's looked good in practice, so I think given our circumstance, it's realistic to think that he'll play.

Q. How tough is this decision halfway through?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it's not that fun. We are playing for today. He's been bugging me for a month, over a month, to get on the field. So there is no decision right now. We have a limited amount of guys and we are trying to win games.

Q. Do you ever have a kid say 'I want to give half a season?'

COACH FERENTZ: I can't remember. We had a bunch of guys in 2001 not want to play. I shouldn't say not want to go play but they wanted to redshirt. There were five or six of them, everybody but Roth basically in 2001. I think it was 2001. Jordan wants to go, and he's wanted to go.

Q. How do you characterize bugging?

COACH FERENTZ: Just he's been positive. He's practiced hard. I ask him weekly: Where are you at mentally, what are you thinking, and he wants to go. He hasn't really been bugging me. It's been positive.

Q. Has he had any reps with the first team?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not like we got -- we do have Cox's Army; the Cox's Army is pretty thin. We don't have a big impressive array of guys out there. So yeah, he's been working. Malloy has

worked and Garmon's worked. It's basically all hands on deck.

Q. How will his style alter the offense?

COACH FERENTZ: He's about 60 pounds smaller, so if they can find him. Weisman you can see a lot easier and if Weisman is coming at you, he's probably not going to run at you whereas he might try to run you over. That's the biggest thing.

Q. Sometimes there's a patience factor that running backs may have.

COACH FERENTZ: Every back is different, but you know, I think Jordan showed us a lot last December and I think he's capable. He's certainly capable. Garmon's going to be fine. He'll be football.

Q. The fact that Garmon was in there and didn't fumble, that has to be good for his confidence?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, how honest do you want me to be about this? He ran out of bounds about eight times and that was okay as long as the ball didn't go on the ground. That's kind of where we were at on Saturday.

A nice run would really have been good but ball security is critical, especially at that juncture. We kind of lost our running attack at that stage. But for him to go in, a year ago he's in Erie playing high school football and doing well, but that was a pretty tough circumstance, bad weather and the opponent was pretty tough. He did his job, so he allowed us to keep fighting, which is good. He'll be better this week.

Q. Do you see one of these guys as a rare breed of high school kids with knowledge of coming in to block?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if I would go that far. It's something he has to work on, all of our backs really have to work on it. I think that's usually the hardest thing for a guy, every level they go up, it's usually a pretty big challenge.

Q. With Mark, will that decision be made by the medical staff or coaching staff?

COACH FERENTZ: No, he's cleared to play. He's not at risk. It's can he play effectively and that's the big if right now; at that position, you always say the right guard.

So I'd say if he was our left guard, maybe

it would be different. But it's tough for a guy to just gut it up and play running back. It's really hard.

Q. Speaking of your guards, Blythe?

COACH FERENTZ: I think Austin was -- they were dressed and he would have been an emergency guy Saturday we were hoping to get through without playing. He's had a couple more days to continue and he's given us the thumbs up.

I think he's ready to go so he'll be in the rotation. I don't know how much he'll play but he's back with us and BJ is back with us and I think everything's fine there. So happy about that.

Q. This team seems to be pretty remarkably resilient; where do you think that comes from?

COACH FERENTZ: I think, first of all, we have good guys on our team, and I think we have good leadership.

So it probably, you know, kind of starts and stops right there. I think that our leaders have done a good job, and we have got a big senior class of guys -- when I say big, there are a lot of guys that are not starting right now that are seniors, but when you watch -- I miss a lot of things on the sideline but you watch the tape and you see like Trent Mossbrucker after a good kickoff coverage right there greeting the guys and encouraging them, things like that. We have got a lot of good stories going on with those guys. They have really been all in.

So even if they may not be starting, they are showing the younger guys how to act, how to do things. Good teams have that. Bad teams typically don't.

There's a lot going on behind the scenes that maybe you don't see. I throw a guy like Trent, who is, you know, he's got Mike Meyer in front of him right now, so that's a tough deal. But it happens in sports, and he's handled it like a champ. He's doing projects for us on special teams and working his tail off upstairs.

It's probably an NCAA violation; he's drinking our coffee -- probably shouldn't say that in public (chuckling). He's drinking coffee occasionally out of our coffee pot and stuff like that. But those are positive things. The guys are all in, they really care about each other.

Q. You've had seven games decided by four points or less; is there a certain confidence in these situations that wasn't there a month ago?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they certainly feel better about themselves today than a month ago. But you know, we have got a long road ahead of us. I think they all know that. The most important thing outside of playing the game is what you do during the week, and I think, so far at least, they have handled that pretty well, and now the challenge is, can we handle it again this week.

And we are going to need to, because you mentioned the points, and I'll take a guess, I got a feeling the next six games are going to be just like the last one, maybe not identical. But it's just kind of the way we are built and if we are going to be any good, we have to get the job done in those games.

Q. Penn State threw a lot at you from a lot of different angles; how have they changed now under the new staff?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it's interesting, they probably threw less at us last year. I just went back through that last night. They probably threw less at us last year than any year. They just kind of handled us. They beat us toe-to-toe. I'll say, this they beat a lot of people toe-to-toe last year.

They beat a really good football team, and if you look at their defense right now, it's not identical to what they have been, but they look very similar. They have three outstanding linebackers. Their front four guys are really good. Hill is an outstanding football player. They have a bunch of guys that are really good but Hill is even -- I think he's our leader in that down four group.

You know, their linebackers are really good like I said and they are very athletic in the secondary. They have a lot of good football players on that team and it's going to be tough for us to try to match up against them, because they are talented. They are really good and they play hard. Their whole team plays hard and that's why they are winning, because they play hard and they execute and they don't beat themselves. They don't turn it over.

And their quarterback, flip it over to the quarterback is kind of representative of that. He's thrown for 250, 12 touchdowns, two picks, and he's just playing great and I'm sure everybody's feeding off of that.

Q. Besides the obvious change in

coaching philosophy, is there anything different you see from them?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a senior and they have been through a lot. You know, that group's been through a lot, unprecedented. I'm just an outsider looking in but to me they look like they are all together and they have all bought in and they are given the new staff a chance. They are all on the same page and really playing well.

I'm just guessing, I'm not coaching there, but I'm guessing he's a big part of that, just like they have a couple guys on defense, too, that are right in the middle of that. They are together and they are playing well.

Q. Have you ever gone up against a team that goes for it as much on fourth down as they do?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I'm sure somebody has done a story or is going to do a story on that, it's pretty unusual. You think about it, it's a whole different ballgame. If you know they are going to go four downs, as opposed to three, it throws everything into a different light.

Q. How does that change your preparation?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, they have an extra down. It's like, you know, if you're a pitcher and the guy gets four strikes instead of three. It's a little bigger of a challenge. So it's documented, they are going to do that and it's also documented they have been really successful at it. As an offensive coach, if you know going in, you have four downs instead of three, it gives you a little bit more latitude to do some things.

Q. How does the fact that Brian Ferentz worked with Coach O'Brien alter your planning?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really, other than it just heightens my appreciation and respect for him. But I know more about Coach O'Brien than I would most people I guess, is that a good way to say it?

I know what kind of person he is and his resumé offensively is pretty obvious, just go to the last stop. But I go beyond it in that you work with people like George O'Leary, Ralph Friedgen, who I think are excellent football coaches and he's done a lot of different things, throwing the ball, option.

So his knowledge of offense is really extensive. And I just said on one of those teleconferences upstairs, maybe as much as

anything, there are a lot of things that are revealing about people, but he took a big step backwards. He left a coordinator's position to take a job in New England that was, I can promise you, low paying, and I can promise you they didn't put the red carpet out for him; been through that.

Most people wouldn't do something like that at that age and that level and that stage of their career. So I think it just tells you a lot about Bill. He's all about coaching and he's just an excellent coach. He's done a great job already there.

Q. After the first few weeks of the season it would be hard to find a group of people that would expect Iowa and Penn State to meet as undefeated conference teams.

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't really thought about that at all. But to me it's not surprising. I mean, Penn State has had great players and they have still got great players and they have had great success and they are having great success now.

So that part doesn't shock me. You know, I was hoping to be, what are we, six games or seven? I was hoping we would be undefeated totally, but we are not. I'm an optimist every year.

Q. What it's going to be like going out during pregame and not having Joe Paterno on the sidelines?

COACH FERENTZ: Different in the sense that since I grew up there, I'm going back to the late 60s now, I remember Denny Esken (ph), Steve Smeer (ph), dating myself, but that part's very different. In coaching, faces change pretty frequently, so that part's not really different.

Q. How does it make you feel to see Anthony Hitchens leading the NCAA in tackles and Chad Greenway leading the NFL in tackles?

COACH FERENTZ: Steve just pointed that out to me coming down the hallway. A year ago, it was probably anger -- if he wasn't at the top, he was near the top at this point. You talk about two great guys, Greenway and Angerer, and Greenway, he would fit right in; he's working this weekend, or at least I assume he is. That's pretty neat.

And Hitch has worked hard, he's improved every week and he's doing some good things out

there and glad to see him progress. Chad, no big surprises. He's one of the best players we've ever had come through here and like Angerer, they live and breathe football. Hitch has come along, too.

Q. Are you surprised by the play of your defensive line this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, I don't know about surprise, but it's a real good story and maybe he represents our whole group. But you know, Joe Gaglione, he's dealt with a lot of setbacks medically. That's frustrating for any player, because you can't get better. You can't -- if you're not out there practicing or playing, you can't get better.

So that really has been a big impediment to his progress and it's neat to see him, that he stuck with it; and that he's able to be out there every day in the spring, and really had a good preseason. So now he's getting some rewards. And the exciting part to us is he should keep getting better, because it's not like he's played all that much.

And then right along with that, Steve Bigach, who started, what, three games last year and he's given us a lot of -- he's doing a nice job as a player. But I mentioned the seniors earlier, he's one of those guys that's just so committed to the whole team.

You know, if I was going to pick one guy in that group that's kind of looking after everybody, he's the guy who really does a good job. He takes ownership that way, and he's grown a nice little, whatever that is. His strategy is for the girls to notice that more than his hairline. So he's a smart guy; pre-med, but he's doing a really good job

Q. Is part of the success the coaching change?

COACH FERENTZ: I couldn't comment on that. I think they just all knew, we're young. We're a young group. I would be remiss not mentioning Alvis, too. Alvis is our most veteran player and those guys really took ownership in terms of, hey, we have all got to be working hard and got to be going.

Reese has done a great job with those guys and continues to do that. But it's -- the secret more than anything is your players, how they accept challenges and these guys are really doing a great job. As I said Saturday, it's fitting that Louis got a fingertip on that ball and kind of got the ball rolling there.

So that -- because he plays a position that's kind of hidden and a lot of grunt work in there. He didn't get the pick but at least he had a finger in it -- I was going to say a hand in it, but he had a finger in it.

Q. Jordan Cotton came up with some great play. One was breaking the interception, laying a block. What can you say about his development?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not the Joe Gaglione story but it's similar in that Jordan was kind of a ghost man a year ago. He really wasn't doing much on Saturdays for us. And you know, he's worked hard. I know James Vandenberg spent a lot of time with him this summer and continues to do that, keep urging him and those kind of conversations. And again, it's an example of the seniors really reaching out and trying to bring guys along.

But again, Jordan is a guy who has made those third down catches, got called back, it was a dumb play on our part, but now all of a sudden, he's finding out, it's fun. It's neat when you see a player really start to enjoy it. That's a neat thing.

Q. Facing another top defense this week, how hard is it for the offense to get fluidity against tough defenses every week?

COACH FERENTZ: Won't be easy this week. Wasn't easy last week. That was a really savvy group, tough group and this one, they are equal. They are a little different style play but it's really -- and it starts up front.

They have got guys up front that really get after you. Their linebackers are very, very active and their secondary is tackling well, so we are going to have to really be at our best and really practice well this week.

Q. Is this a week where passing game has a chance to take off, particularly with Weisman being out?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we are just -- realistically we are down a couple backs right now that have proven to be productive this year. We are not going to give up on the run but we are going to have to try to compensate a little bit and spread it around and do what we can. But it's not going to be easy. These guys get after you good up front. So it's going to be a good challenge for our line to try to neutralize their front.

Q. You talked about O'Brien helping McGloin. Has Brian Ferentz has a similar impact on May Tobin?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, Matt did a good job last year. We have already talked about a couple guys, you get into your senior year, you hope guys are playing their best and Matt's doing that. He came here pretty unheralded, we liked him. We didn't know what was in his future. And even early in his career, there are some things he would flash in practice and most of it is because he would compete.

So that's a credit to him. He's worked hard with Chris Doyle and Reese and now Brian, and I think it's a cumulative effect for him so now it's a real credit to him.

Q. With all the close games and tough competition this season, how big of an asset is it to have a kicker like Mike Meyer?

COACH FERENTZ: We don't have a lot of proven week-in, week-out players on our team right now. We are kind of just scrapping along here, but Mike has entered that point I think in his career, and I felt like that in the spring, just the way he practiced. So much of what -- and that's why Weisman was a surprise on one hand, but on the other it wasn't a surprise because he works so hard and you see him do so many good things.

He's had a great spring and great August, and every week at practice, he just continues to perform. So I didn't realize it was a 40 or whatever it was, 42-yard field goal the other way. I think we all have confidence in Mike right now. He's done such a good job.

And I'll give an assist that Nate Kaeding, I talk about seniors on our team but that's one of the neat thing here is the linkage to the past with guys like Kaeding who lives in town. Many of the guys come back and train with our guys in the summertime. And Mike's smart enough to pick Nate's brain, which you know, if I was any football player, I would pick Nate's brain. That's a pretty good brain to be picking.

Q. Mike came in as a walk-on. Is he on scholarship now?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, absolutely. Awhile ago.

Q. Talk about scrapping along, is that a mode that just you guys know pretty well?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, we have never been overly endowed, I don't think. It starts with the head coach. Just kind of trickles down but that's the nature of us and if we are going to play well, and have a chance to be there at the end, we really have to do well and I think everybody has embraced that.

We have got a pretty good reminder of that a couple of weeks ago; that if we open the door at all, people are going to go right through and I don't care who we are playing. We can't let our guard down at all. We are really, you know, walking a pretty thin line here.

Q. Does that allow you to play the chess game, and think of moves down the road?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm more of a checkers guy; I usually get my ass beat. I don't know. You know, we are just kind of taking it day by day now. One thing about football, things are always changing and you know, we went through that Saturday, all of a sudden, Weisman is out and what have you and you just go with what you got and just keep trying to find the winning combination if you can and what have you.

But everybody's -- as long as everybody's working hard at it, you've got a shot.

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