

**December 2, 2009**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

**COACH FERENTZ:** Thanks for coming. Just a couple things I want to do today. First of all, I just want to take this opportunity to congratulate our team and our staff for the great job they did. Certainly I think our record speaks for itself this year. It was a lot of fun, guys who overcame a lot of challenges and what have you. It was just a fun team to work with. So I just want to congratulate them and thank them for their efforts.

We had a lot of guys get Big 10 honors last week, and we've got some other guys in the running for some other awards. That's certainly fantastic and the result of a lot of people putting a lot of good efforts out there. Very, very happy about that.

The other thing, too, I just mentioned, to bring you an update injury wise, and I think I said this at the end of the season, I'll give you an update right now based on what I know. We met yesterday medically, and it really looks like we're in good shape physically, which is exciting to us.

Probably the guy that's in the dickest area would be Dace Richardson. I think he should be close to full speed if not at full speed after finals, which is two and a half weeks off, and we're optimistic that he'll be able to play in the Bowl game. We expect Adam Robinson to practice this weekend. And Ricky Stanzi is getting real close, also.

So that's kind of exciting because we've had a lot of injuries, especially on the offensive side. I'm anxious to see the team practice together and hopefully make some progress during this coming month. Looking forward to that.

The other thing I just want to touch briefly on is just congratulate our guys on the terrific job

they've done off the field. So far it looks like we're having a good semester academically. I really think the guys have done a wonderful job in terms of citizenship and are doing a lot of good things, and [Chigozie Ejiasi](#) started in his job a little over a year ago. I think Chick has really helped us a great deal. He's done a good job interfacing with our players, particularly our younger guys, and he's also helped us in a lot of areas.

We've had our first-year players, I think we've had seven or eight lectures now during the course of the season, outside people coming in to visit with them about different topics. Chick has also organized our community service program.

I was at a banquet in the summer, heard another head coach make reference to the community service hours that their players had put in, so I asked Chick to put a pencil to that. I think we've had 587 players involved now since the summer of '08, and they've totaled over 1,700 hours of community service.

We're not doing it for the statistics, but I just want to throw that out there because I think it is significant, and most importantly it's really beneficial for our players. I think they really learn a little bit about giving back and doing some things that are very valuable.

When we ended the season, somebody asked after the game, if we were BCS worthy, and my answer at that time was I wasn't really sure. And I wasn't, because I really hadn't been thinking much about that. But I've had a little time to think now, and I think I'd answer that question with a yes.

It was interesting this past weekend. I think all of you know I'm a big fan of taking Thanksgiving off. I think that's a great thing. It's a great American holiday. It was fun just to be a fan over the course of the weekend and actually watch other teams play, hear all the hoopla and all the hype and all that stuff.

A couple things that really came away from

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the weekend for me, first of all, the amount of upsets that there were. I think we had three teams ranked ahead of us that ended up getting defeated, the amount of close games that were played, a lot of very competitive, tough games, and that's what you expect in conference play, and I think that stood out. The other thing that stood out to me is how injuries can impact a football team. That was reinforced on Sunday, also. A lot of the pro teams had some significant injuries. But those things all impact and influence how a season goes, how a team performs, and I think those things actually reinforce the job that our players did this year because we certainly had our set of challenges.

As far as our football team, I'm not here to pit us against anyone else, but I think a couple things really stand out. If you look at our team, the way they've competed on the field, the head-to-head results that we've had, we did beat six Bowl-eligible teams. Two of them were non-conference games. So we're proud of that certainly. And I thought our guys did a great job taking a very challenging road schedule, and they embraced that with four victories and an overtime defeat at a very, very tough opponent's home field.

I think if you look at our losses over the last couple years, something I think our team can be very proud of, we lost two games this year, one by a touchdown, and we were leading that game when our quarterback went down. The other was by a field goal in overtime. The two teams that we lost to, I don't think we have anything to be ashamed of. Northwestern has won 17 games now the last two years, and Ohio State has had unprecedented success the last five years in our conference. So I think that's a real thing -- something our players can be proud of.

And I think if you look back to last year, the four games that we lost, we were three points a game in defeat, so the biggest margin of error being five points there.

I think what it indicates is our guys have done a great job of showing up and competing the last two years, week in and week out. That's what's been so enjoyable for us as a coaching staff. That really carries over to our Bowl games, as well.

You go back to '02. To me I'd compare that to 1981 where we went out to Pasadena and really didn't know how to act. It was the first time we were in that arena, and we spent a lot of time bowing and shaking hands and all that, and we forgot to prepare and got beat pretty thoroughly. I

think the same thing happened to our football team in '02. We lost to a very good opponent, but we didn't do a great job preparing.

Other than that we've played very well in Bowl games; we've beaten Texas Tech, we beat Florida, LSU, South Carolina last year, and had two very close losses, one to Florida and one to Texas a couple years ago. Again, I think that's something I would really advocate when it comes to our football team.

I'll just close with two points. I've always told our team you kind of get what you deserve. I think it's true on the field for sure. And I go back to our two championship years; in '02 we ended up being the BCS selection by the Orange Bowl. In '04 we didn't quite get there that year. We were 13th, I think, in the BCS rankings; Michigan was 14th. But Michigan beat us head-to-head that year, and they went to Pasadena, and that year there was only one team that went to the BCS. So that's how it goes sometimes.

But the bottom line is this: I've never been to a bad Bowl. Never had a bad Bowl experience, and think that's going to definitely be the case here. We're very excited about what our team has done, and whether we're playing in a BCS Bowl or any of the other Bowls, Orlando, Tampa, San Antonio, they're all great experiences, and I can assure you our team is going to be very, very enthusiastic, and we're looking forward to the challenge.

Our work will begin this week. We'll start practicing a little bit this weekend, and we're just anxious to get back on the field and get together and see what we can do pushing forward.

With that I'll throw it out.

**Q. In the interest of getting this out of the way so we can get back to more pressing matters of the day --**

COACH FERENTZ: Let me take a guess where we're going. That's good, you can open the door for me.

**Q. Jack Swarbrick said last night at Notre Dame that he would begin contacting potential candidates, as you know. As always, your name is thrown in there. I've got to ask, have you or any of your representatives been contacted by Notre Dame, and would you consider it if you were?**

COACH FERENTZ: First thing I'd say is

that's Notre Dame's business, nobody else's, as far as I'm concerned. What they choose to do is their business. If they had or hadn't, I think that would be inappropriate for me to comment on that.

Secondly, I'll give you the same answer I've been giving people and we give recruits all the time. I've been sitting here for 11 years now, and the people that throw it out in recruiting, my typical response would be to just ask our prospects or any prospects, to ask that question right back to the team that's throwing it out there. I know Coach Paterno and Coach Bowden have been in their jobs longer than I have, and I know Coach Brown has down at Texas. Outside of that, I'm not sure who else is on the list. Bob Stoops, Randy Edsall, two guys that I have great respect for and are friends. We all came in the same year. I think we're the only three survivors from our class.

I can just tell you what I've been telling people for a long time; I like it at Iowa. I've had paychecks from three different places now since 1981. My first full-time job was here. I'm not a vagabond coach, and I like it where I'm at. I've enjoyed every day -- not every day, but most days, and you know, I don't see things changing here.

I'm going to go back to, just so you guys know this, I tipped our team off, we had a team meeting yesterday morning, and I asked them--one policy has been in place, but I've added to that. I've always asked them not to discuss injury situations. I just don't think that needs to be out there. It doesn't give us any competitive advantage, and I'll be the voice of that.

The other two things I asked them, if anybody wants to ask them about these two topics, just bounce it right back to me. Anybody's NFL status -- I can tell you right now, John Wienke is not coming out for the draft this year. We established that yesterday in the meeting. But please don't ask our players about their NFL status, and please don't ask them about my status. And I gave them the same talk. It's just -- to me it's all -- we've got a lot of good things going on with our football team. And we've had some bad things go on, and they've all been reported, too. But there are a lot of good stories, and I think those things are a lot more meaningful to the fans out there than if John Wienke is going to go to the NFL.

I'd just appreciate you trying to resist that temptation. But if you don't, you're doing your jobs, too. I'm just telling you right now what our players are going to tell you. Outside of Derrell; he might

give you an answer. You might not see him until after the Bowl game. (Laughter.)

**Q. What would he say?**

COACH FERENTZ: Who knows what he'll say.

**Q. What are your players going to say?**

COACH FERENTZ: They're going to say ask me, which was just asked, so we're good to go.

**Q. Stanzi, what's his progress?**

COACH FERENTZ: All we did yesterday is the guys went out and did a mild run. They basically didn't do anything at all. He's moving around really well. He was bouncing around a week ago Saturday. He probably could have thrown the ball, but he'd be at risk back there. But things are really going well with his rehab.

We're not going to do an awful lot with the guys that have played all season long this weekend, but he'll be out there throwing the football around. I fully anticipate him to be full speed probably next week. He could probably play this week. It would be a little shaky or what have you.

**Q. How about Jeremiha and Tarpinian?**

COACH FERENTZ: Those guys are good to go. Jeremiha is really close. Tarp, I mentioned him. Talk about great stories. Jeff had a mild knee sprain out of the Ohio State game. He practiced all week. He didn't quite look 100 percent, and then pregame we just decided, why fool around there, so we pulled him out.

And this is illustrative of our football team. So you've got Troy Johnson who's the No. 3 choice at will linebacker, and jumps in there and ends up being the Big 10 Player of the Week. How good is that? How neat a story? And he played a great game obviously, our defense played a great game. Again, after watching the weekend, anybody worried about the 12-0 score, yeah, they all count. They say horseshoes -- I've never played horseshoes, but they say it counts in horseshoes. You know, it doesn't matter if it's close or not. There were a lot of teams that would have taken a 12-0 win after last weekend.

I thought it was a great effort, and again, that's illustrative of our team. Most of our challenges have been offensive, but Troy jumping

in just like Joe Conklin has at free safety, really a good story.

**Q. Is the NFL going early thing, is that a good problem in your eyes because recruits see that?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, I'd rather have everybody stay through their senior year. I personally think it's the best thing for any player. But it's kind of like we get occasional calls, staff members, guys call and say we'd like to talk to so-and-so on your staff about a position. I don't answer for our coaches, and I always tell people that. I respect the call, but I think it's up to our coaches to make the best decision, and for the players it's the same way.

I know we have three guys right now that are worth talking about. We've already probably beaten that horse to death enough. But it's a very simple process. I think it comes down to getting the right information, where do they really fit, not based on somebody's dot com site but talking to NFL people that really know and watching all the tape, and they also know the draft board, so you try to get that information in front of a player.

And then after that I think every player has to determine what are they looking for and what slot are they thinking about and what's realistic, and then it's entirely up to them. Last year Shonn made a decision to go out; Fred Russell made the decision to not come back; he was a fifth year -- or fourth year of eligibility; and Dallas made the same one. I'm not going to say anything whether I'm right or wrong. Obviously, Dallas has worked out there. But it's a personal decision.

To me, my job is to make sure we get the information, accurate information, in front of the players, and then it's up to them to figure out what it is their looking for, their families are looking for.

**Q. There's a January 15th deadline to declare. Is that too early for the players? I mean, the draft is in April, and seemingly there would be plenty of time.**

COACH FERENTZ: Things do shift. But I think the eligible NFL people right now can give you a fair idea of where on the board someone is going to go. There's nothing exact, and it's like anything else, if you -- let's say you declare on the 15th, if you do poorly afterwards, your stock can go down fast, and conversely there are a lot of workout warriors that elevate their stock. I was always leery of those guys when I was coaching in that arena. It all gets weighed in. But I think in

general terms players kind of know where they're going to go.

**Q. Have you had any discussions with Dace about possibly coming back --**

COACH FERENTZ: No, but I'm going to do that this week. I plan on doing that. It's the same thing, it's really up to him. He's been through an awful lot. What a great story. But I can tell you this: From my observations, I don't think he's ever enjoyed football any more than he did this year, of the years he's been on campus. And now the choice is, does he? -- he's already graduated, so that's not an issue, it's just a matter of what he chooses to do. I'll tell you this, I'll very hopeful that he stays. It would be great to have him back for another year.

**Q. With the BCS thing, it seems like it's you and Penn State. Is there a level of uncomfortableness with that, going up against a fellow conference school?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, none of us -- I think we all pull for each other, I really believe that. I can tell you this: You've heard me say it many times, how much respect I have for their program, and it starts at the top. They've got a legendary coach, and that's not just talk. Coach Paterno has done so much -- I've said this so many times, what he's done for sports in general, college sports in general, I think he's been so good in so many ways. I can just tell you he's a tremendous human being. He and his wife are just great, great people.

How do you cheer against -- Ohio State, they don't have to worry about it, but I've got such respect for their program, and it's right on down the list. In that regard, the reality is they're probably going to pick -- one of us will get picked and one of us will have to stay home.

But there's no bad Bowl, at least I haven't been to one yet. Bill Brazier said that in the '80s, and boy, he knew what he was talking about. We have had nothing but great experiences, so how can we lose here? That's the way I'm looking at it.

The best way we can counter that, maybe we can coax Coach Gable into coming with us if we play in a Bowl. He is a living legend, too. Put his record up against anybody in any sport, I can't imagine anybody is better. Maybe we can convince him to go with us, and we'll throw in Coach Fry, too, maybe he'll jump in there and try to balance it out a little bit, because we've got a lot to

overcome in that regard.

**Q. You talked about being pitted against Penn State. Are you surprised at the amount of campaigning and the organization these teams have had out there?**

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't really paid attention. I just know this: I know our TV numbers are great. I know our fans travel. I can't imagine anybody travels better. I'm sure somebody has got an abacus -- remember those things? That's before your time, but somebody has been counting all that stuff.

But our fans have been -- they're nuts. I mean, our fans are crazy that way, so that's great and that'll help us. But it's just -- we're all going to win. That's how I look at it. We're all going to win.

**Q. In this process do they ever call or talk to you in the days leading up?**

COACH FERENTZ: I have not talked to anybody -- outside of I visit with people that come into town when they do for the games. I think that's pretty traditional. I don't know that many people. I'm not a great phone guy.

I know Gary Barta has done a great job with that, and to me that's his job. I don't mean that in a -- to me he's better versed in all those types of things. I'd just as soon stay out of it. But I know this, we're going to be happy to go wherever we go. I am confident our team will play well. I think we'll go play well wherever we go. The only thing I know, we're going to play a very tough team no matter where we go. Just go down the list, it's going to be a tough game.

**Q. When you found out in 2002 you were going to the Orange Bowl, it was a different setup, but did you know the night before?**

COACH FERENTZ: To answer your question, no, I didn't. It's funny, we were talking about the lineup for Sunday, this coming Sunday, and that seems like it was about three decades ago. So I can't remember.

But I think -- the only thing I remember, all of us were basically in shock because if you recall we finished up a week early, the Rose Bowl folks had been out here, a large party had been out here to just lay everything out for us, so I think there were a lot of people in shock, and certainly as I understand it the system has been tweaked a little bit since that time.

**Q. How much do you think head-to-head should figure into it?**

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, to me it's -- if it was as simple as that, which in my mind it should be, but I think it just says an awful lot. I think it says an awful lot if you just look at how teams played against each other. I think that's what you get judged on.

I tell our players all the time, we get what we deserve, if we played better than that team that day. That was our attitude going to Ohio State; we didn't have to beat them best out of seven. It was a one-game series. Philly beat the Yankees in Yankee Stadium in the opener, right, with Cliff Lee? He threw a hell of a game, and they won that game. They lost the series, but they won that game. That's what it comes down to, what you do.

I go back to what I saw this weekend. It made me appreciate our ten wins that much more, because football is tough and it's competitive. Everybody wants to win.

**Q. When you took a step back this week and were watching games, if you look at the fact that there are still six undefeated teams, does that sort of change in any way your idea of whether the system is fine the way it is?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm fine with it the way it is, and I'm okay with the plus one. I'm okay with that. But I think anything beyond that, I just don't think it's realistic. We ask so much out of our players. But if we all go to a Bowl game and then there's a plus one, I'm open to that, and obviously there's going to be a debate. Team 5 is going to be upset about that one.

But that's so far out of the realm of my jurisdiction, so I don't worry too much about it.

**Q. When a team like Notre Dame changes coaches, does that reopen the recruiting trail in your mind for kids who are verbal to that school? How do you treat that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Perhaps if we were contacted by someone. Unfortunately, we all have -- those of us in coaching, this is a great job to have. Unfortunately, this is the season where people make decisions and changes get made. That's the reality of the landscape we work.

So if somebody contacts us, typically then that may be -- we'll certainly entertain -- we've kind of run out of room on our bus right now, but if we

get some intriguing offers or interest level, but we really haven't had much of that.

**Q. Let me ask you another question about the past season. You've had a lot of great plays this past season. Could you just go over and list the top two plays in your mind when you think of this season and why they're the top two plays?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, without thinking too far into it, the first thing that comes to mind is Adrian's play at Penn State. That was our spark there certainly.

If you go to Wisconsin, it's probably the series of the interception by Amari and then Tony and Stanzi hooking up for a great play.

The Stanzi to McNutt play, that was pretty good, at Michigan State; that wasn't a bad deal.

And then you can't skip over the goal-line stands. I didn't answer the question. I went over my two.

And again, my point is in competitive football there's so many things that happen for you to be successful, and those all involved different parties, other than the two goal-line stands. For us to win, and that's kind of been the story of our program; historically for us to win, we have to do a lot of things right, and I think that's, again, a credit to our players. They've really done a nice job.

**Q. Blocked punt return is No. 1 because of where it happened, when it happened?**

COACH FERENTZ: Adrian's?

**Q. Yeah.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we needed a play at that time. I can't remember the score, 10-3 or something like that, and we needed a spark, and once that happened, it seemed like our team just took off at that point. I thought on the sidelines I felt pretty good about what was going on from that point on, whereas you go through those periods in games where you're just kind of -- we're trying to get something ignite and what have you and go from there.

This doesn't relate specifically, but I'll go off on a tangent. Speaking of games that, last night I had a chance to be in the arena. I'll get on my soapbox for just one second. I don't know squat about basketball, but when I watch our guys play, we're really young right now. The energy our guys have, we're not that far off. And I don't go on those chat boards, message rooms, I don't do that

stuff, but I just hope everybody realizes it's a process.

I've gotten to know Todd. I just have such respect for Todd and his staff, watch what they do, the way they compete, the improvement they're making. I just go back to 2000, '99, we walked a pretty tough road those two years, and it was tough to find a lot of friends and what have you, but you just keep working. I think he's building a heck of a team and a heck of a program.

I just hope everybody will -- I know reporters have to write what they have to write, but I just hope everybody stays positive and stays with it, because it's going to be worth the investment, I really believe that. And I'm looking forward to that day.

**Q. Do you get a chance to talk to him that much, because he has mentioned the way you built this program as sort of a model for what he wants to do.**

COACH FERENTZ: We both enjoy a cup of coffee. He likes drinking coffee, and I do, Gary does, too, so it's a good common denominator. Yeah, we'll have a cup of coffee a little bit. It seems kind of funny, we're both on the campus. Our offices are a couple hundred yards apart from each other, and our schedules don't mesh enough, well enough, but we do get -- I think we just like talking because we do have some common ground that way.

I remember in the '80s I used to see our basketball assistants, I saw them in the St. Louis airport a lot more than I did on campus, and at that time our offices were in the arena, so it was kind of ironic. But that's the nature of our schedules.

I love talking to any good coach, and I've got the utmost respect for Todd. I think he's a top-shelf coach and person. He's just a great fit for our school and our state.

**Q. Talking about the season, what was the best game the team played?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, boy. All the wins. You know, and ironically maybe we played our best at Ohio State, ironically. You probably could have made some money. I'm not into gambling, but I'm guessing you could have made some money that day if you put some up. But it was a process getting there. I think our staff did a great job getting the team ready.

Everybody is quick to point out what we

don't do right offensively. How about getting Vandenberg ready? We all saw what he looked like coming off the bench and the progress that he made. He's going to be an outstanding player for us. He had a tough day a week ago Saturday. But that's all part of the process.

It's like the basketball; it's something, you go through the highs, the lows, what have you. But we probably played as competitively over there, other than we didn't do a great job against the run, and they certainly had something to do with that. They've got a big offensive line, a couple good backs, and the quarterback is as good an athlete and you're going to see anywhere. But I thought our guys really competed and handled the environment very well. Maybe in defeat that was possibly our best effort.

**Q. Are you amazed at the level of conversation that Ken gets --**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not really sensitive to that. I hear bits of it, and I'm amazed on one hand, but I'm not amazed on the other. Again, as a fan this weekend, boy, there are a lot of experts out there. I didn't know how many experts there were. I think it's worse than basketball, because they've got like a billion games on TV. There's almost every game on TV, which means you've got to have a couple announcers and analysts and all that stuff. Where are they getting all these people? But it's interesting.

But I just know what I know. I think I'm so happy with our staff. We've got a great staff, top to bottom. We're just really lucky that way.

**Q. is there a job for you there?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, don't worry about that. That won't happen. Never say never. I can say never on that one. Don't worry about that one. I may not even go in the stadium. I can't wait to tailgate, and I may never go in the stadium. Of course I may have to watch it on TV. A lot of guys do great jobs. I'm a huge fan. We're lucky. At least our TV hookups, the guys that come through here are really good. I mean, they're really good, outstanding, so we've been lucky that way.

**Q. Who would you vote for in the Heisman?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, boy, that's a tough one. That's a tough one. I mean, where do you start? Florida, how do you go against that? I don't know if I've ever seen a quarterback play any better than McCoy did against Texas A & M. What

a performance that was, running, throwing. And that back from Stanford, we saw him on film against Arizona last year. Boy, what a performer he is, too. It goes right down.

Mark Ingram got hurt over the weekend.

I'm not quite sure we all appreciated what Shonn did last year. To go 100 yards in every game, that's tough to do. There aren't many guys that have done that in their careers. But he's a great football player, too.

So there's a lot of great players out there. I'm not answering that question. I don't have a vote, so it doesn't matter.

**Q. Is it ironic, if Shonn had come back and put up the numbers this year that he put up last year, he probably would have won the Heisman.**

COACH FERENTZ: I had that thought at one point, somewhere in the last ten days. But again, I'm not a big look back on things. I'm not one to look back at the what-ifs. He made a good move, and he's already doing well with the Jets, and it worked out for him beautifully. I'm really happy for him. It was great having him back. He was back for the Northwestern game, just showed up on Thursday afternoon, unannounced like he would normally. He declined to speak to the team like he normally does, and that was it. But it was great having him here.

**Q. How do you pace your practice time between now and Bowl game time?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think we have a routine that we're pretty comfortable with. The first part of -- really prior to finals being over, it's just more about trying to keep our guys sharp and work fundamentally. The guys that have played the most will work the least. Right now this is a real important time for our guys I think to rest up.

Tony Moeaki hasn't been 100 percent healthy since he's come back. He's played well, but there's a better Tony there, and I'm eager to make sure he's rested so he can play at 100 percent in January.

So we'll try to be very smart about that. It gives us a nice chance, too, to work some of the younger guys. We were too nice to them the last six weeks of the season, so now we'll get a little bit of labor out of them and see what they can do.

**Q. What would your reaction be if a**

**10-2 Big Ten team was passed over for an undefeated smaller conference team?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, if that's the way it works, so be it. First of all, I don't have an awareness of how the whole BCS thing works. I really haven't studied it or looked at it that hard. But those teams all had great years, I know Boise, TCU, and who am I leaving out? Cincinnati, they're BCS. Are you talking about title game or the BCS Bowls?

**Q. Just the BCS Bowls.**

COACH FERENTZ: I assume they're in because of the Big East. But Boise and TCU, those are excellent football teams. The Bowls have a tough job here. They've got a tough choice, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing. Again, wherever we end up, we're going to be really happy, I promise you that. We know we're going to play a tough opponent.

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