

August 6, 2007



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: I apologize for being a little bit late. Just a couple news items to start with real quickly. First of all, just want to welcome President Mason on behalf of everybody involved at the athletic department, and I think everybody on campus, certainly excited to have her start here last week and I think everybody is looking forward to her leadership.

And also at the same time I'd just like to thank Gary Fethke for his service over the recent months, helping pick up the slack. I think everybody agrees he did a great job, and now he can finally get on to doing the things he'd been looking forward to doing. So we appreciate that.

Second thing I'd like to do is just take a moment and thank our fans for their great support prior to the start of the season. It's really been interesting to watch our ticket sales and the way they've gone over the course of the summertime is exciting, not only for home games here but also the kickoff game up in Chicago. We're very appreciative of their support, and hopefully we can pay them back during the course of the season.

The last thing, it was talked about last week, but just one more time I would like to express my enthusiasm for the Big Ten Network, the advent of that. I think we all know Commissioner Delaney is one of those guys that tends to be on the cutting edge, and I think it's a real exciting proposition. I think it's something we're going to see all the BCS conferences shift to in the next couple years.

That being said, in any new venture that starts, you're always going to have a couple bumps in the road, so I think we're all prepared to handle those. But at the end of the day it's going to be a great thing for all our programs. The exposure all our teams will get all over the state of Iowa and across the country for Iowa fans is going to be great.

I think the other nice benefit about it is the fact that we'll have a chance to take some network hours and dedicate that to other things that are going on campus, and there's so many things there to choose from. So I think it's just going to be a great thing, not only for the athletic department but our entire University, and I'm excited about that.

On the football front, obviously we're excited about getting started. I think every coach is feeling this way, and to me it's a little bit like signing day. Everybody is optimistic right now, always feel good about your recruits, and every coach and every team right now is undefeated going into the season, so there's a lot of optimism that way. We're certainly looking forward to getting going here at the camp.

I think we've had a good summer. All reports are the summer went well for us as a football team, and we're excited about getting out there now and starting our practice sessions.

I think for the most part we're fairly healthy. We have a couple players that had surgery, most notably Rob Bruggeman and Jeff Tarpinian, those two guys. At some point we expect them to join us. Jeff will be the first guy back as far as full contact. I think Rob will be a little bit further behind in that progress, but I think they both have a realistic chance at being back at some point early season to mid season, and we're hopeful of that.

Had a couple other guys that are nursing injuries as they go along, or coming off injuries from a couple years ago, Devan Moylan obviously is a little bit behind. He didn't really get to jump in there until the end of June, so he's got some ground to make up and still is coming off a pretty serious injury from a year ago. Dace Richardson is going to be phased back in, and it's going to be a while before he's full speed, I think, and also Pat Angerer had a bout with mono in the month of July, so he's practicing but not full strength, either.

But for the most part we expect everybody to be ready to go.

Special teams-wise, we have a lot of areas on our football team right now where we have strengths and we also have areas where we're going to be young and inexperienced, especially on the special teams. That's an area we've got to improve upon this season if we're going to have a

good season, and that's going to be a collective effort.

As far as the specialists go, we've got Daniel Olszta back who's done a great job for us deep snapping. Beyond that we've got a lot of inexperience in our kickers and punters. None of them have really played substantially at this point, so that's going to be interesting to see how that part comes along.

And then right along with that, we are anxious to see our core special teams develop, how those guys come together. But we're optimistic there.

Defensively obviously we're pretty experienced up front with the interior defensive line and our interior linebackers. Both our corners are experienced. We feel pretty good. I think we all know who A.J. Edds is, got a good look at him last year, and when he did play he played well, so we feel pretty good about that.

Probably the biggest question right now is what we do with the safety position. We've got a couple older guys in Harold Dalton and Devan Moylan competing, and then a couple younger guys in Brett Greenwood and Lance Tillison, so we'll be anxious to see how that goes as we proceed through camp.

Offensively I think we're fairly skilled and experienced around the perimeter. Look at our running back position, we have three seniors back there. It's really the only senior position we have on offense.

Receivers I think got some good experience a year ago, and the tight ends to a degree, Tony Moeaki played an awful lot and we expect him to play a lot, and happy about the way Brandon Myers is moving along as a player.

And then the offensive line is certainly a question mark for us. That's something we're really watching closely, eager to see how that develops this month. And the quarterback position is the same way. We saw Jay Christensen play one ballgame, that was great experience for him, but needless to say he's got a lot of work to do at this point, but we're pleased with the way he's doing things, as well.

We've got a lot of things that are going to be interesting to watch during the course of the camp. The good news is I think we've got the makings for a good team, and now it's up to us to go out and do the work that has to be done.

Certainly we're eager also to see our freshmen, our first year players. We've got a good group of those guys out there, and you watch them during the recruiting process, you have a chance to watch them on tape, get to know them a little bit

as people. Certainly what they do in the next three weeks will be interesting for us to watch, see how they handle the stress and pressures of camp, hold up to the rigors there, and we'll probably know a little bit more the next time we get together about how they're going to fit in, if at all. But we're excited to get those guys here and get them started.

Obviously it's a very important phase for us, so we're looking forward to getting started as a football team. I'll throw it out to questions.

Q. Competition is always a good thing. You look at your offensive line and basically no seniors, so there could be some roles perhaps defined for not just one-year, but two-year. Do you think that adds more of a competitive spirit this year in practice?

COACH FERENTZ: I think everybody is anxious to go, and we probably have eight or ten guys realistically that have a chance to be in the starting lineup. At this point I think Seth Olsen is the only guy I think that's really established himself, although Rafael Eubanks and Dace Richardson have played. We've had a chance to see them in game conditions. But I think the competition will be good, and we are a young group.

That's a very solid point. We don't have a senior in the group basically. So it's going to be -- I think once we can find out what the combination is going to be, we'll go through the ups and downs of a young group. But I'm confident they'll come together and we're going to be okay.

Q. If Jake continues to progress and do the things you need him to do, do you anticipate him being the starter on the first game of the season, and also, how has his progression gone?

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say he's got a heck of an edge obviously. If you look back, I mean, it's really a parallel to the last three guys that have started for us, be it Drew Tate, be it Nate Chandler or Brad Banks, all those guys served as the backup the year prior to taking over. Obviously two of those guys were fifth year seniors when they got their opportunity. Drew was the same age that Jake is now.

I think the common denominator is all those guys did a good job as backups. They really treated that position with the respect it has to garner, and I think they've taken advantage of it where they've had a chance to learn and execute.

When Jake was called on last year I

thought he did a good job given the circumstances, and the big thing is he had a good spring. I'm confident he's had a good summer. All reports are it looks like he's in better shape than he was in the spring, not that he was in bad shape, but he just -- we see him maturing. He's got a great head of his shoulders, so we're real confident he'll do well.

It's probably more interesting to see what the young guys behind him do. They're the young guys that have gone through their first spring now, and typically when you go through that first spring as a quarterback it gives you the opportunity to see the bigger picture a little bit better, so we're very anxious to see how those guys perform over the next 15, 18 practices, see how they do.

Q. Getting to see those guys for the first time today, what was the initial thing that you saw?

COACH FERENTZ: It was okay. You know, I mean, we looked like a team that thought it was hot out there, and it was hot. It's hot everywhere right now. But we looked okay. We looked okay. It's hard to fall in love after one workout.

But the guys have had a good summer. We moved around okay today, our attention was decent, but we're going to have to pick it up, and we will as we get going here, but it was a good start.

Q. You made a change at offensive guard since last week. Is that whole offensive line except for Seth likely to change daily?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about daily, but some guys came out because of heat today, at that position, other positions, too. So it was hot out there, and that's going to factor in, too. I think we pretty much started today the way we finished up in the last spring scrimmage.

We're just going to keep an open mind. It's not like anybody is an incumbent at this point. Outside of Seth, it's just a matter of where we plug him in. We're going to get the guys competing and see how things go.

Q. You guys have had a lot of success on special teams. Dallas Clark out there, Sean Considine were out there. You seem to move more of them back having starters.

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, yes and no. The guys you mentioned, very valid, Hodge, Greenway, you go right down the list. We've had a lot of guys who were prominent players here. But they were playing well on special teams before they ever hit the field. Dallas Clark is probably the

best example, being a third team outside linebacker, that's really when we figured out we've got this guy in the wrong spot because he's so exceptional on special teams and was just okay on defense. So my sister could have figured that one out, that we need to look for a different position.

But that really -- we tell players all the time, it's not a -- special teams aren't an area where you have to maybe be as well versed or as conceptual in your thinking as you do in some other phases of the game. So it gives the younger guys an opportunity to get out there and play without maybe having the depth of experience, and what we're hoping is some of the younger guys will grab that opportunity.

I don't think we did a good job of that last year. And again, I go back to a lot of our best players; most of our best players outside of the offensive linemen kind of got their feet wet on special teams, and we need guys to buy into that and understand that. We've also had a lot of guys like Scott Boleyn, Chigozie Ejiasi, you go down that list, guys that never started here, Robberto Rickards, our first year who was actually on the scout team during the week but was an outstanding performer on special teams.

It just offers everybody a chance to get on the field, create a role. You don't have to be a starter to be a contributor and impact our football team. We came up short last year in that area. We probably need to do a better job of conveying that. And then we're also going to open up our minds a little bit in terms of maybe using first year players, even if they're not going to be in the starting lineup on offense or defense.

Q. How much does the departure of Sean Greene take away from what you hoped to do at the running back position?

COACH FERENTZ: That's another area, we feel real good, obviously, about Albert Young and Damian Sims. We've seen them play very well in Big Ten play, but after that it's a wide open book, and I can't stand here today and tell you that I really feel great about anything at this point. We hope to in three weeks.

We've got Dana Brown obviously, got a couple young guys, Paki O'Meara from Cedar Rapids, Washington, and also Jayme Murphy in there competing, and Jevon Pugh will have an opportunity, as well. That's going to be real important the next three weeks to see how those guys come along because it's rare when you go through with two backs, and certainly the guys I just mentioned should be able to help us on

special teams, as well. We're going to need them, too.

One thing I skipped over, camp is a little bit different this year. For the first time since 2002 we've actually got three weeks of preseason practice before we get to school week and game week. So it's a little bit different. The last couple years we've gone to school, had a week and then started game week the week after, so that will be a little different challenge for the team, as well.

Q. Do you think there's anything to that based on the last two years, that maybe your record would have come out better, that you've just not had as much preparation?

COACH FERENTZ: It didn't seem to affect us in 2004, but if it turns out like it did in 2002, I'll buy it. I think it would be a great thing. We'll have to petition to make sure school always starts a little bit later than that.

Q. With the new quarterback and young receivers, how heavily are you really going to rely on Sims and Young?

COACH FERENTZ: We feel pretty good about our receivers. They're pretty mature. Let me rephrase that. We feel a lot better than a year ago. Last year we came out of the spring where it was really kind of underwhelming the way we performed at that position.

But last year to see Andy Brodell come on the way he did at the end of the year, and he's had an outstanding spring, outstanding out of season. To see Dominique Douglas do some good things as a young player, guys like James Cleveland, Trey Stross, I think we have the nucleus -- we're not there yet, but I think we have the nucleus of having a good receiver corps.

So we feel good about that and we feel good about our running backs needless to say, and I think Tony Moeaki will step up and do a good job, and I feel the same way with Brandon Myers. So with those skill guys I feel pretty good there.

The bottom line is we'll probably look similar to what we have in the past offensively. If Jake is in there, he's our quarterback. Whoever starts at any position, we're not giving out hall passes. We need guys to perform, and I think that was his goal when he came here. He wanted to be a good player for us. We'll try to be smart how we use players. We can't go out there and just hand off every snap. That's not going to get it done for us.

Q. Does Douglas have everything straightened out?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he does. He had a good spring. I was a little concerned about that back in the spring to say the least. I feel a lot better about him. I've always felt pretty good about him as a football player from day one when he walked in here. But I was concerned last spring just in terms of his ability to concentrate at the level you have to concentrate at to be successful in the classroom, and I think he demonstrated at least in the spring semester he's totally capable and willing to do the kind of work that you have to do if you're going to get a degree, and that's first and foremost.

Yeah, we expect him to continue on. We've had other guys that have chosen not to do that, so I think it's a real credit to Dominique and we expect him to keep on that path.

Q. Of all the areas where you want to improve offensively this year compared to last year, would you say time of possession is one of those statistics?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm probably less worried about that than turnovers, just being smart with the football, and we did a horrible job there. If it wasn't for the freshman quarterback on another team in our league, we would have led the league in -- in a negative way on the turnover margin. Just the fact that we were worse a year ago than we were in '99, and that wasn't very pretty, to me puts it all in perspective.

If there's one thing we need to do -- part of that is us doing a better job on takeaways, as well. But we clearly didn't protect the ball and make good decisions with the ball like you have to. You're not going to win in any league if you don't protect the football.

If you study the stats, it may not be as critical at some schools, some programs, that turnover ratio, although if it was like we had, you're not going to win anywhere. I don't care how good your talent is.

If you look at our championship years, we did a heck of a job. I think we were plus 13, plus 15. Don't quote me on that, check it out yourself. But it was significantly better. So that's where it all starts for us. If we don't do a good job of protecting the ball, we're not going to win many games.

Q. As far as takeaways, how do you work on a daily basis to get that job done?

COACH FERENTZ: It's something we drill. Certainly we drill not only on defense but special teams. You remember the Iowa State game, 2001, we make the pick and then they got it

right back. Danielson made a great play there. If you've got the ball -- if you're touching the ball in any way, it's your responsibility.

But it also factors in protection. If somebody blows an assignment on protection, you can't expect the quarterback to protect the ball when he gets hit by somebody he's not expecting to get hit by.

Like most things, it's a team thing. Interceptions aren't always a bad throw by the quarterback, it might be a receiver not running the route at the proper depth or making the wrong break or not reading -- there are a lot of things that go into it, so it's usually a team thing. And then takeaway things, yeah, it's something we drill.

We want our guys stripping the ball. That's good for the guys carrying the ball, too, so it's a win-win situation. But yeah, you have to emphasize it. Most of all, you've got to do it during the game, but yeah, it starts with coaching and practice.

Q. There were a couple segments on nationally syndicated radio devoted to undermining your strength of schedule on the drive up here this morning.

COACH FERENTZ: I missed that.

Q. Does it look as weak to you as many people are saying across the country, and kind of what's your take on that criticism?

COACH FERENTZ: It's an obvious question, obvious topic, with all due respect to the hosts of that show. Nobody cried a couple years ago. We had a couple teams off our rotation that I think were sub-.500, nobody said a word, and we certainly didn't say a word about our schedule being tough at that point.

Really the best answer I can give you, if you take the two teams out of the equation, we were 2 and 4 last year in Big Ten play. So my conclusion there is, and I hope everybody is buying into this one, at least in our group, every game is going to be a challenge for us. That's the attitude we're taking.

To win in our conference, it's not easy. We proved that last year. It just starts out with an appreciation of what it takes to win. And when you lose that, you open the door for bad things.

You know, every game on our schedule, we've got 12 of them scheduled. I have no control over who we play in our conference, and we didn't in the '80s, either, so it's never been an issue for me. We've just got to worry about playing the schedule we have in front of us. Based on last

year we can do a little better job there, so that's what we're working on.

Q. You have a quarterback who hasn't been through the wringer as much and a young offensive line. Is it easier to get those guys to buy into what you're trying to do?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think the new player typically, at least, yeah, they just want to go out and play well. They're maybe not seeing as big a picture as guys who have played three years or four years, but again, for our whole football team that's really how we need to approach this season. That's really going to be the key for us.

Our first challenge comes less than a month from now, and that -- we'll have our hands full there. We did a year ago with that same team. That's really the approach we have. I think we've got three out of four on the road to start with. You can look at all those things, too, and factor into it.

But it really gets down to right now just having a good camp. If we can have a good camp that would be a heck of a building block for us, and we'll see how we deal with each week as they come along. We'll have our challenges, I'm sure of it.

Q. In preparing for the Alamo Bowl last year you talked about getting back to basics in the spring. Is that something you're keeping with?

COACH FERENTZ: We certainly hope to, and it's no more extensive than what I just described. What we need to worry about right now is just having a great month of August, and that's really all we can concern ourselves with. We have a lot of questions to answer about our football team right now, and you know, the great thing about college sports and working with younger players, you know, the opportunity to improve is usually a little bit more dramatic than it is with older guys, so that's something hopefully we've advanced over the course of the summer to this point, and then hopefully if we handle the next three weeks well and stay healthy, we'll be a much better football team when we start to turn our sights towards our opening game.

But I think that's really got to be our mindset right now. Anything beyond that as a player or coach is really to me counterproductive.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I haven't asked Andy, but just from an outside observer standpoint, sometimes confidence is a wonderful

thing for players, and I think sometimes -- nobody can hand you confidence. It's something you have to earn. Usually there's a little bit of a residual effect there. But I think when you have a little bit of success, I think it tends to excite you as a player and as a competitor, and I think that's certainly what we saw with him.

He did a lot of good things. He did some good things early in the season, too, but he got beat up, as you know, and at times I thought he looked a little tentative, but those last two ball games he looked healthy. That last game in particular against Texas, it was against top rate competition. Those guys are legitimately fast. The combine proved that and the draft proved that.

So to see what he did against top-notch competition like that I think has only helped enhance his enthusiasm and his confidence level. When you have success, you tend to get a little bit more excited about what you're doing, and I think we're seeing that with Andy right now. I think he's really looking forward to the challenge of this year and the next couple years.

Q. Talk about your place kickers, between Austin Signor and Daniel Murray.

COACH FERENTZ: We really haven't done much. We've only had one practice and what have you, but that's something we're going to measure over the long haul. I really don't expect any dramatic separation there. It may be something we have to toy with during the season even, but we'll try to create some situations where they have to go in unexpectedly, what have you, and kick and perform and try to create some pressure situations.

But just like anything else, it's different to do that on the road or in Kinnick Stadium. We'll keep an open mind and see how things go.

Both guys are working extremely hard. I think they've got a good maturity level, and I'm hopeful that we'll see some good things there.

Q. A partner of takeaways is pressure, and you have a couple of young and inexperienced players at safety. Do you expect more pressure in the front line this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're more veteran up there. Basically that group has played two years now, so it would sure help us, and the way we play defense, we're not a big six-man rush team. We really don't do a lot of that. Our preference is to play four guys rushing and then seven guys in coverage. That's what we'd rather do the majority of the time. The more those guys can shoulder up front, the more it's going to help

us. But they've got to do it within the framework of our defense, too. We don't let our guys run around like nuts. That's just not our style of defense.

You know, I'm confident with the maturity level, and more importantly, the practice, the way those guys practiced in the spring, Mitch King of note. I thought he had a tremendous spring. He really had some things nagging him last year. He didn't look like himself. He had a great spring. Kenny Iwebema looked like he was full speed again. Mattison always brings it every day, and Matt Kroul is probably an underrated player. Those four guys give us something good to build off of, and now we've got to bring some of the other guys along, too.

Q. Just how confident do you feel with just having the continuity you have on the defensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not worried at all about Rick, first and foremost. Ron Aiken did an outstanding job, and there's a reason Arizona hired him. There's a reason other people have tried to hire him over the years. I'm very appreciative of the job he's done in all regards.

Rick is a very, very good football coach. We wouldn't have hired him if we didn't feel that way. He's already worked extremely hard, and he'll do a great job. Players have responded very well to him.

But it's just good, it's always nice to have a defensive line that's got some veteran savvy to them. In a perfect world you'd like to have both your lines like that. If you did, it would be a great situation. It doesn't work that way too often, but we're real excited about that.

Q. Talk a little bit about the guys that are waiting to fill out that six- to eight-man rotation.

COACH FERENTZ: I think there's a lot of competition. The first guy I'd mention is Adrian Clayborn. He was red shirted last year, just tremendously impressed with his work ethic. He's got leadership attributes. He's a tremendous young guy, and goes at a real high tempo in practice, so we really like him.

Chad Geary is an interesting guy, coming along, walked on here and has really worked hard on his body, came here as a linebacker, very aggressive guy, and we're excited to see how he looks.

Anton Narinskiy moved over from the offensive side, was defense, offense, back to defense, and he did some good things in the

spring, so we expect him to be a guy that will play probably 10, 15 snaps a game, give a little rest in there. And after that we're looking at some of our younger guys, as well, and see how they might enter into the mix.

If you go back and look, we've never been eight deep going into a season. That's the whole trick, if we can get a couple guys to step up and get into that rotation so they get their feet wet a little bit and bring them along, it would be a great thing.

Q. What has (inaudible) done to cement his place on the line?

COACH FERENTZ: Basically just the way -- he's an interesting story, too. He's a guy that ran with our twos his first year on campus as a red shirt freshmen, so he got all that work. We talked about the quarterback; offensive line is a similar deal. So he worked as a two but red shirted.

We really thought a year ago at this time, a year ago spring actually, that he'd be one of the guys in the mix for a starting job. And he kind of plateaued and hit the wall a little bit. I thought maybe he'd snap out of it in camp, and last year in camp he was okay. But it's hard to say he was in the mix for a top position.

And then when he got his opportunity over at Illinois, he jumped in there and just played very, very well. It's not the same thing as Andy Brodell, but here's a guy who got an opportunity, jumped in and played well, and just never looked back. Kept on doing a lot of good things out there. We had him playing several positions, played inside and tackle, as well, but again, he's a great leader, he's a very tough-minded guy, and he works extremely hard.

I'm getting ready to nominate him for an Outland, although if you're a returning starter you get nominated for all these watch lists, don't you? I don't know how he didn't make one of those.

We're not ready to nominate him for All-American or anything like that, but we think he's a pretty good football player, and he's going to be the kind of guy that we really build around.

Q. What did A.J. Edds show you --

COACH FERENTZ: When he came in, my thoughts were he'd be a tight end, and then he got a little thin last year so we moved him over. A lot of schools recruited him as a linebacker and we liked his versatility, that's one of the things we were impressed with. But we really thought he was a good tight end prospect, still do.

But I think the first thing I'd bring up with A.J. is he's extremely serious, extremely conscientious. Some players have a better ability to absorb what information they're presented with, and he's got that ability. He can really take things and process them, and they show up out there on the field.

He's worked extremely hard in the area of strength and conditioning. Not to suggest that he needed to, but he's really -- he works at a pretty good rate there. It's not like he's a first-year guy or a second-year guy out there, he's got a little girth to him. He just has a lot of the attributes that some of our players at that position that have played well have shown before. We're excited about that, so we think he's got a real good future out there.

Q. How has Devan Moylan's recovery been and how important is it going to be to get him back?

COACH FERENTZ: Devan's injury was extremely serious last year. It was a nasty one that required surgical repair. That's bad.

He was working to rehab for an outside shot at a Bowl game. We knew that probably wasn't going to happen. He thought his career was over, so I think he de-trained a little bit. But he wanted to keep that going. The thing he's trying to do right now is catch up on the volume of work that our guys have done since January until this point. He's a little bit behind.

But he's not a guy that ever got too far out of shape. He's kind of a fitness nut. I was teasing him in spring ball, he was out at practice every bit as much as any of us as coaches were. Every time you looked up he was standing over with the secondary. The guy loves football. He hasn't lost anything mentally, and I think he's not far behind, but right now we just have to be careful in camp that we don't break him down physically. We've got to be smart about that. I'm confident when September rolls around he'll be there.

Q. Talk about opening at Soldier Field.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've been excited about the match-up from the announcement. Gary Barta and I both did a little press deal over there last week after the Big Ten luncheon, and that really impacted my feelings about the whole thing.

We're excited about the match-up, first and foremost. I think it makes a lot of sense. I know our fans have been excited for good reason, and I can't wait to retire. I'll join you on that trip whenever we do that one because it's going to be

a great weekend for everybody not involved in the game.

But then walking in the stadium, the only time I had ever been in there was I think December of '98, and I was thinking about a few other things, I really wasn't taking any snapshots of the stadium. But to walk in there the other day -- it's just going to be phenomenal when our guys go in there for the walk-through the Friday before the game.

Playing in pro stadiums I think is neat anyway. Our guys really enjoyed playing in Tampa. To play in a pro stadium like that that's so historic, and then you go in there, boy, it's extremely impressive, and knowing it's going to be sold out, I think it's just a win-win situation for all involved.

I think our fans are really going to enjoy it, unless we screw it up as a team, and I know our players are going to look forward to going over there. Once they get in the stadium, I think it's going to impact them just how neat this whole thing is. I'm not saying it's one of those kickoff classic games, but I think it's got the makings of kind of a kickoff atmosphere like they used to play out in New Jersey or the one we played in in Kansas City. Hopefully we'll be a little better football team than we were in 2000, so we'll look forward to that.

Q. Can you comment on the importance of these couple weeks in preparation for the school year?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, camp is always important for a lot of reasons. First and foremost, it gives you a chance -- especially in the first part of camp to evaluate your team. There are a lot of things that camp -- situations camp creates just by the nature of two-a-day practices and summer weather and the monotony, potential monotony, if you will, the ability to kind of lose your focus if you're not careful. You get a chance to see how guys react to situations that way. That's always interesting.

Hopefully you stay healthy. That's always one -- anytime you work hard, you have a danger of that. It's just one of the most critical periods for any football team on any level. It's one of the most enjoyable times in its own sick way to coach because once we finish up with the team picture today, pretty much we're locked up for three weeks, and that's a nice -- it's the only time in the year where you really kind of have -- you never have them totally obviously, cell phones and all that stuff. But at least you've got a chance to get their minds for a little bit.

But it's a big time, and to have an extra week is really kind of a nice thing quite honestly. Players will feel differently, but the coaches like it.

Q. Cell phones you have on lock down?

COACH FERENTZ: They're allowed to use them in the hotel or if they stand outside our building. We have an atrium where they can use them, but I'm not wild about seeing them in the locker room. Hopefully they're not taking them in the weight room. We don't allow that, or meeting rooms and stuff like that, and they shouldn't be taking them to class, either, in the fall. You know, we're not totally insensitive.

Q. Are there any modifications at practice when it's so brutally humid like it is this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, if this continues right now, we were in shorts today, we'll be in shorts tomorrow without pads. It's not a huge factor. Obviously we hydrate more, and we're talking about that all the time. We'll take more breaks during the course of practice. If it wears on, we'll cut some periods, do things like that.

Obviously you're always -- you have to test people, but it doesn't do any good, either, just to get out there and run out of gas after ten minutes. I'm not quite sure what that proves. It's not really productive. We'll try to be as smart as we possibly can that way.

Q. If you had a state-of-the-art indoor facility, would you be in there during this heat?

COACH FERENTZ: No, probably not. Probably not. It's hot everywhere in the country right now. It would look nice, but -- I don't know. To me it's for wind and lightning. That's what it's for. Or if it's cold. I don't think it's going to get under 30 this week, so we'll be all right.

Q. Just when you think you may have sent your last text message, some of your fellow coaches are pushing to have some of it brought back.

COACH FERENTZ: It's going to come back.

Q. Whenever you hear some of their examples, saying that it's best for the kids, it allows kids to communicate with us, are you a little skeptical when you hear things like that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, yeah. I don't

want to get off on a big tangent here. It's a great way to communicate. Some of the text messages, the ones I receive, aren't real in-depth typically, nor are the ones we send out. I don't think any of us are too artistic on that thing.

To me the only purpose, the real benefit of it is you can text someone and say I'm available, please call. Outside of that, I think it's an awful way to communicate, other than hey, maybe here's some information you asked for, that type of thing. My favorite one is still the commercial where the guy texts to pass the ketchup and the kid gets mad at him and says, I wonder where we're going as a society. But it'll come back, I know that. If we can control it a little bit, that would be great. It would be great.

Q. With two 7:00 o'clock games (inaudible).

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I like them better at home, you know, only because it's a long day on the road, and it's a longer day coming home. You end up getting back in the middle of the night or morning. So it affects -- but it's like anything else, they're scheduled. We know well in advance it's our job to get ready for it. The good thing is it just adds to the environment, be it at home or on the road, and that will be a heck of a test on the road.

It'll be a great environment in here, and you'll learn a little bit more about yourself, too, when you get in those things. They're on the schedule, we'll deal with it, and that certainly, like text messages, night games, they're coming our way. We're going to get more and more of those as we go along. You can put your head in the sand or you can deal with it and try to adjust and do a good job with it.

Q. I'm not sure this is right, but I think your last night road game may have been Arizona State a couple years ago. Did you learn anything to keep their minds occupied from that that you're going to want to try against Wisconsin?

COACH FERENTZ: My mind was more like on 2005 Wisconsin. It was dark at the end of that game, wasn't it? I think, so we got home late that night. So yeah, it's tougher when you go out west. I don't like going out west, I will say that publicly, because now it is 4:00 in the morning, 5:00 in the morning when you get back here.

Again, we know when the kickoff is, and it's probably more about how we play when we kick the ball off than it is what time of day it is. It's what we do to get ready.

Q. Is there any focus, like anything you'll plan to do that day to maybe keep their minds occupied?

COACH FERENTZ: We just move our Friday evening meetings to Saturday morning and just kind of entertain the guys. Coach Parker gets up and tells some stories on Friday night and things like that, fireside chat with Norm, milk, cookies and a couple stories and put them to bed, something like that.

Q. Given the young age of the leadership, does that cause you any concern?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. You always worry about that. In comment about our seniors, we have 13 seniors, getting Devan back gives us one more, which is not a huge group.

But if you look at it, all those guys really have an opportunity to be integral parts of our team, and we need them to be. They've all got leadership attributes, so that's a positive.

We've got some guys like the Mitch Kings, the Matt Krouls, who I think are very capable, and on the offensive side your point is well taken. Certainly we've got three seniors in the backfield. Seth Olsen has been a leader. We're counting on him to continue that way. I think Andy Brodell is ready to assume some of that with his group, and Tony Moeaki is certainly capable.

Yeah, we're going to be searching for an identity throughout camp, there's no doubt about that. I've been down that road before. But I'm confident it'll come around, and I think it's one of Jake Christensen's best attributes. He really does a nice job. I think he's real aware of his actions, his comments at all times.

He's been schooled a little bit there. I think having a dad that's played that position probably helped him a little bit. But he does a good job of that, not only through his example, how he works, the tempo he works at, the intensity, but also just the things he does behind the scenes, the way he studies, prepares, et cetera. I'm not ready to throw any crowns on him yet, either, but I think he's got the attributes you're looking for to be a guy in a very focal position, so we're excited about that.

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