

**September 13, 2011**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

**COACH FERENTZ:** Injury-front, unfortunately Dakota Getz injured his knee on Saturday on the first play, first kickoff, so he had that repaired Saturday evening, and he'll miss this season. This was tough, because he just came off another surgery from earlier this year. It's obviously a disappointing time for him.

Captain-wise, we've got the same four guys, Tyler Nielsen, Mike Daniels on defense and Marvin McNutt and James Vandenberg offensively.

And then just very briefly, it was certainly a disappointing loss for us this past weekend. A lot of positives on the tape, but a lot of things that we need to work on. Got a lot of work ahead of us right now, so that's kind of where we're at at this point.

The key thing for us right now is to learn, and then we'll have to move on because we're playing a really good football team in Pitt this week. They've got a new staff. Todd Graham has done a great job throughout his career. They've got Big Ten experience on that staff, with at least three at least that I can count off the top of my head who have experience in the conference and have played against us. So they'll be familiar with the surroundings and the team and all that type of thing.

And most importantly, they've got good players in all three phases. They've got good players, and I think they've gotten off to a good start which was really impressive considering they've changed philosophically on particularly offense and defense. They're really a different football team than they were last time we played them. They're off to a good start. They've got good players they're playing. It's good to be back in Kinnick certainly.

But we've got our work cut out and we've got a lot of things to work on internally here, and that's where our focus will be today.

**Q. How is Jordan Bernstine?**

**COACH FERENTZ:** He's back with us, yeah. He would have been fine Sunday. We didn't play Sunday, so that didn't help us.

**Q. How is Tyler Nielsen's ankle?**

**COACH FERENTZ:** He'll be fine.

**Q. Marcus Coker had 35 carries on Saturday. How critical is it for you guys to get somebody else going behind him to take a little of that burden off?**

**COACH FERENTZ:** Well, we're going to have to, and it's just one of those things we're going to have to jump in the water with it. Certainly Jason White is the next guy in line, and then with Mika'il being out, I think I mentioned last week we'll move Damon Bullock back there and continue to work him. He'll probably be the next guy in the game.

**Q. What did you see on tape on the defensive line that maybe concerned you the most?**

**COACH FERENTZ:** It's like most close games. We've had more than our share of those. It gets down to fundamentals. There's always things you can improve upon. I know this, if we're going to allow their quarterback this week or next week or any week to come out of the pocket with regularity, it's going to put a lot of pressure on everybody defensively. It's really no different than punt coverage. The one long punt return they brought down our bench, if we don't contain the return guy, it's going to be really tough to have a good return average there, too, and that's something traditionally we've done. But we were very poor at it on Saturday, and I can't tell you how

many times they broke containment defensively on us. That's going to be really tough for us.

**Q. Punt and kickoff coverage, is that a personnel issue or just a coverage issue?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I'm hoping it's not an issue on the punt team, but it was Saturday. A couple things involved there, but I think we will be okay there. I'm concerned about our kickoff team right now, mainly because we've been riding a roller coaster. It seems like forever, but it's been at least going back to last year. I can't remember much past that.

And we're -- when we hit, we hit pretty well, but when we miss, we miss badly, and with the work that we have to do defensively right now, to think that we can let somebody start with the ball on the 40, 45, 50 or the other side of the 50 week in and week out, it's just not very realistic. We're going to have to try to figure something out there and do a better job certainly.

**Q. How much does it have to do with the kick itself?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, not a lot. I mean, we had one that got out of bounds, wind caught it a little bit, and that wasn't good because they get the ball on the 40. It's like starting a scrimmage in high school. But outside of that, there were a couple of bright spots Saturday. Mike's performance both kicking off and field goals obviously was pretty good. So that was one of the bright spots. That only leaves coverage, I guess, right?

**Q. You said Saturday how when a quarterback breaks contained, it leaves you guys vulnerable. Can you explain how it leaves you vulnerable and where?**

COACH FERENTZ: Most every defense, no matter what your scheme is, somebody is responsible, just like coverage and kickoffs or punts. Somebody has got to set an edge and hold an edge so the rest of the guys can help do their jobs and play their positions. But once a quarterback gets outside of that, any anybody with the football, but the quarterback in this case gets outside, it puts everybody in a real precarious position, plus the guys coming across the field can't be of any help or assistance.

It's stuff you learn like when you're in junior high school typically. Well, used to in the old days. I'm not sure anybody is learning it anymore. But anyway, I will say good high school and junior high

school teams understand guys got to contain. I think most of us learn that growing up, and we're not doing a very good job of it, so we're going to have to coach it better and just get it accomplished somehow.

**Q. Is that keeping your outside shoulder free?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, typically. Somebody has got to make that guy redirect back or pull up or something, but if you let them run downhill on you, it's just not good. We've had way too many instances the last couple weeks, not just last week, so that's one of the first things we have to do.

**Q. What has to change on Saturday for Marvin McNutt to be more part of the offense?**

COACH FERENTZ: That came up last Saturday. I'm not too hung up on that one. The ball -- it's kind of like run-pass ratio. At the end of the year, if we're throwing the ball 85 percent of the time, it probably means we're just getting drilled and that's not a good thing. But all that stuff will work itself out. I mean, the other day the ball went to Keenan more. It doesn't really matter where it goes as long as it's going somewhere and we're catching it and moving forward. That will all come together.

**Q. Do you feel the same about the tight ends?**

COACH FERENTZ: In a perfect world you'd like balance, but it depends on what's going on. Sometimes it's how they cover you, sometimes it's what those players are doing, too, and what have you. But in a perfect world it's going to get spread around a little bit.

**Q. With Pitt's new offense, what does this quarterback do?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, what we're going to see this Saturday is probably a lot like what we've seen the last two weeks, and if you flash back to Michigan, as well, a couple assistants on the staff are from Michigan, that's what you're going to see. You're going to see the quarterback option attack, throwing the football, a lot of plays, fast-paced, all that type of thing. We'll see him run the ball, we'll see him throw it, and they've got an excellent running back, too. I'm sure everybody is aware of that. He's a really good football player,

got a good offensive line, they've got good skill guys out wide. So it's just a matter of them really getting this thing in sync, but they've been doing pretty well.

**Q. Last year with guys like Terrelle Pryor, Dan Persa, and this year it's Jantz, even the Tech quarterback gave you some problems. What is it about these mobile quarterbacks, this option type stuff?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, take Terrelle Pryor out of that equation because there aren't that many guys walking around with his -- my sister could point that out. But it's true really at any level. If a quarterback -- I remember Billy Daniels, who coincidentally played at Pitt when I was in high school, the guy could run around and throw the football. He was a dangerous guy. That's a tough guy to defend. Brad Banks had that same combination. They're rare, and when you have guys that are doing a good job, it just makes it that much more pressure of a situation for a defensive football team.

**Q. What's Micah's position? Is he still in flux between safety and corner?**

COACH FERENTZ: Last time I looked he was still playing safety, so that's where he finished up, yep.

**Q. Christian Kirksey is very productive for you. What is it that he brings?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, he's a good young player. He's got pretty good skills. He's not the biggest guy right now, but he's young, second-year player on campus. Just to give you a comparison, when Greenway and Hodge were here, they both red shirted that first year, and when they were at this point, they were both playing special teams, and then in year three they were both playing. I'm not comparing him to those guys other than just the physical development, mental development. But Christian, he's got good instincts, he's really showing that. He's done a lot of good things for us, and we're asking him to do a lot. His numbers were really good the other day, but like everybody on our team, not just offensively or defensively but everybody on our team right now, he's got a lot of things he still has to get a lot better at and see quicker, and there's some things that -- everybody was guilty of giving up some things and coaching-wise, too, so we all have a hand in it. He's like everybody else; he's going to have to keep getting better. But he's got a great

attitude. He's going to be a really good football player for us.

**Q. Is he maybe a little faster than the linebackers you've had the last few years?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he only weighs whatever he weighs. I mean, when we recruited him, I'm not even sure he was 200 pounds. He can run pretty well, yeah. To answer the question, he runs pretty well.

**Q. You've commented the last few weeks on some poor tackling. How do you guys address that this week?**

COACH FERENTZ: Just keep working at it. It's like blocking, catching, anything you do in football. We keep working at it. You only have a limited amount of guys out there, so we'll try to be smart about it, but we have to keep working at it.

**Q. How much do you guys do that during the week?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we do controlled drills where we tackle, and it's probably the best way we can simulate the actual tackling. It's just how you do it, I guess.

**Q. What are the biggest things you took away from your year with Jackie Sherrill at Pitt?**

COACH FERENTZ: Interesting because we saw Coach Sherrill on Friday. It was good seeing him. Yeah, that was my first exposure to Division I football, so it was -- I had been at Worcester Academy two years, I had played at Connecticut, which at that time was more like a Division II program quite frankly, so I had seen teams like that on television, but I had never been up close to them first-hand.

We had amazing talent. It was a magical run that Pitt had, I think, where they were 33 and 3, and I was right in the middle of that stretch, so Coach Sherrill really -- and they had come off a National Championship in '76. So we had great players. I think we had the year I was there, second in the country, we had 11 guys drafted, I believe, six free agents, three first-rounders. That's not including Marino, Covert that were first-rounders that were sophomores. So we really had good talent. Bill Moss was the scout team defensive lineman, so one thing I saw was, boy, it's a good idea to recruit well. That was good.

But it was just a great experience for me being the first time I was around Division I football, and it was a well-run program. Their parking at Pitt -- at that time it was up on the hill, now they're across on the south side, but in those days it was worse there than here, parking. They towed my car one game. GAs didn't have parking spots. (Laughter.)

**Q. As you get ready to prepare for Pittsburgh, does it make it any easier preparing for them that Iowa State and Tennessee Tech kind of showed you some of the same things that they'll show you on offense?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, there's some carryover. I guess that's good. The bad news is I hope there's no carryover on Saturday. We're going to have to do a better job defending. That's first and foremost right now. But at least there are some parallels and similarities.

**Q. Do you take away some of the mistakes as almost teachable moments on Sunday and Saturday, which is this play here, you not applying your technique correctly cost us this many yards, whereas if you win the game maybe they won't listen to you but the fact that they lost could propel them --**

COACH FERENTZ: There's a pretty impressive guy that I met that that's one thing he always said: Failing is education. If it is, then there is some benefit. But there's not much fun about losing, there's not much fun about leaving the door open, and when you do that, typically you lose. If we're not learning, if we're not moving forward, then it's going to be shame on us.

We need to be a much better football team in a lot of areas on Saturday if we're going to first of all have a chance to win this game, and then secondly to get where we've got to get or are trying to get. We've got a lot of work ahead, but you can only do so much in three days, too, so that's kind of a challenge for us. But it all starts with the attitude you take.

**Q. Have you been able to go over and see Brett Greenwood, spend time with him?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I've been over there, and I don't think there's really anything to be released right now or any comment to make.

**Q. Is there a chance we might see younger guys get into the mix a little bit? As a coach when do you make that decision to give**

**some other guys a shot if someone on the D-line or --**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a daily process. Something I think about continually, constantly. That's one of my key responsibilities. We always look at the whole roster, and we talk about it pretty frequently, especially this time of year, the months of September and August. At some point we'll kind of get settled in.

But I think all of us went into this year with the mindset that we never -- you're never quite sure what's going to happen, what's going to materialize, what things are going to look like, and when you lose a player like Dakota Getz, you lose a player like Mika'il McCall, we've lost two now for the season, at least it looks like for the season, that affects things, too.

We can't go to the waiver wire. We're not going to make any trades or anything like that. So we've just got to looking at what we have and see what we can do to fortify the team on Saturday.

**Q. What are your thoughts on Marcus Coker's performance? Another kind of critical fumble early that helped Iowa State get back in the game.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, like some other players, he's more prominent, everybody can watch what Marcus is doing. But like a lot of players, I think he took a step forward Saturday, but clearly has work ahead of him, and he knows that better than anybody. But I think it's reflective -- I think he got a lot accomplished last week, and now the next challenge for him is to continue on that track because obviously we can't have running backs putting the ball on the ground. But I don't think that's characteristic of him, and I think he's on the right path.

**Q. Can you talk more about depth at running back?**

COACH FERENTZ: It won't take long. Basically we have Marcus, we've got Jason, Damon Bullock is the next guy in, and then after that we'll go with D'Andre Johnson or Jordan Canzeri. That's kind of where it ends.

**Q. Talk about what the spread can do to the front seven with a mobile quarterback. What's the burden on the defensive backs?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I mean, whether it's spread or whatever the formation or personnel



group is, if a team can threaten you across the field, if they can get the ball out there throwing it or running -- everybody across the field has got to take care of their business. It's kind of like the quarterback, Gabbert, in the Bowl game. That guy could throw the ball basically anywhere on the field, so boy, you've got a lot to worry about there. A well-run spread offensive football team puts a lot of pressure on you in a lot of different areas, and it gets down to a lot of one-on-one battles. So it makes it a challenge.

**Q. Pitt has had a nice run of tailbacks here. I guess what's the challenge in the Graham kid? I think he's leading the country in rushing. What's unique about him and what's the challenge in stopping him?**

COACH FERENTZ: Probably the first thing we would tell you is he's a strong runner, really a strong, aggressive type guy, so you know you're going to have to tackle him. He's got good vision, like most backs do. But he's a guy you really have to tackle. He's a good football player.

**Q. What are the improvements in the place kicking game? Meyer was really automatic, and that was part of your game last year that cost you a couple games. Seemed like he was just automatic whenever you called on him at any distance on Saturday.**

COACH FERENTZ: We were hoping we'd be better this year, and I think I mentioned maybe coming out of camp or somewhere a couple weeks ago that it really looked like all three of our -- two of our kickers had improved. Trent was really struggling last December and in the spring, and I thought he had a good preseason. Mike has really continued to improve, and we expected that and anticipated that. And then Marshall Koehn has been a real pleasant -- I don't want to say surprise because we thought he was a good player coming out, but you never know until they get on campus, and he really competed well in camp, too, so I think it's one position we have depth in. I don't know if any of those guys can play running back. I haven't thought of that. We'll have to ask them.

**Q. They pulled Sunseri late last week for the freshman, but they said Sunseri is going to be the guy this week. Does that force you to prepare for both them?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we have to, but I think Sunseri is the starter, and if the other guy is in the game, we'll have to get ready for him, too.

**Q. Is Jordan Cotton healthy? Is he just kind of behind some guys right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: He is right now. He's healthy but he's been injured unfortunately a couple times, and he's certainly flashed two springs ago when he was healthy, and right now he's kind of with the rest of those guys fighting for a position right now.

**Q. How about Mike Hardy? He seems to have disappeared.**

COACH FERENTZ: No, he's still here. He's practicing and doing a good job. He's a young guy I think is going to be a good player.

I don't think you guys saw him leaving, did you? Maybe you saw him leaving the building, I don't know. I'm always looking for information, I'm sorry.

**Q. What do these non-conference games against Pac-12 and Big East schools do for you?**

COACH FERENTZ: As far as the Pac-12 goes, not much to me, other than aggravate you when you have to go out there. It's fine when they come here. If we can get one of them to agree to come here every time, I'd schedule them gladly. I said Pac-12, right? Yeah, you guys think more globally than I do. I'm still up with last week's news.

And the Big East, in theory, recruiting a little bit, that's one of our thoughts is try to hit schools that we might recruit in that area, but I think we're about 0 for whatever in Pittsburgh. I was just talking to the reporters from Pittsburgh, and Sean Lee held hands with us for a short period of time and then went to Penn State, a great young guy. In the big scheme of things, probably not a lot, quite frankly. And now if we do go to a nine, which I guess we're going nine games, that kind of makes it easy. Shut the book on that one, I guess, right? It takes the drama out of it.

**Q. You guys have had a good history, successful history of guys that come through your program and get into NFL training camps even if they're not drafted. Are you surprised that Derrell never got into a camp this off-season?**

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, when it comes to who the NFL, what they see and what

they choose to do, I don't know if I'd ever be surprised. They all do their homework, and it's in their hands.

**Q. He reached out to me and said that he thinks that you maybe have said some negative things about him that's kept him out. Can you comment on that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, first of all, I really don't want to go into a dissertation with someone that didn't finish the season, other than to say, typically players' actions speak for themselves, and I haven't slammed any player to anybody since I've been here. That would be a no, I guess, right? Was there a question there or not?

**Q. Did NFL people contact you about him and ask you about his character?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. I have not had one question since -- I had very few questions in the fall quite frankly. So on that topic I can unequivocally say nobody has asked me anything since and including December. Hawkeye Nation has been waiting to hear the answer to that one, right? That's like yesterday's news to me, right? Just to answer the question, no.

**Q. You had 75 of 82 from your media guide from 2002 to 2009 that got into camps. It seems a little puzzling that a guy that is Iowa's all-time leading receiver couldn't find his way into a camp.**

COACH FERENTZ: Again, I'll go back, I haven't said anything negative about anybody, period. And the other thing I'd just add, I imagine most of the guys that ended up in NFL camps probably played in their last game as a senior on the team. That would be my guess. I'm just guessing. I don't know, I'd have to go back and research that.

**Q. It's been a lot of second-guessing this week --**

COACH FERENTZ: Really?

**Q. With the last series of regulation, the 4th and 1 in overtime. Can you run through those maybe one more time?**

COACH FERENTZ: Really, what do you want to know?

**Q. On the road, is it your idea to play for overtime?**

COACH FERENTZ: Our idea is to win the game typically. That's what we're thinking, home or away.

**Q. And then the 4th and 1, once you have that, driving the decision there, is it getting points simply at that point? An empty possession in overtime is probably dead?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, pretty much, yeah, and obviously I was banking on us being able to keep them out of the end zone. Knowing what I know now, I'd have done it differently for sure, yeah.

**Q. Did you see Scott Chandler at the game on Sunday?**

COACH FERENTZ: I heard that. I haven't had a chance to watch any NFL football. I understand two touchdowns? Which is fantastic news. It's a credit to him. He's really hung in there. I think he's been on several teams. He was here for a significant amount of time during the lockout, and he's starting a family, which is nice. His brother is doing the same thing. Nathan is doing a great job, and it's a real credit to his perseverance and stick-to-itiveness. It sounds like he's found a home, which when I heard a couple TDs, and I believe he started. They were telling me that Brandon Meyer started last night, too. Those are great things. Those are great stories. Those guys have worked hard and done a great job.

**Q. Do those NFL success stories have a trickle-down effect like Bulaga his first year out?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they're all positives. I hope we have more guys in a couple weeks where we're saying, "hey, that guy might be an NFL guy." But those guys all had to work their way up to that. Scott was not a knockout player when he got here but he really carved out a nice career for us. That's typically how our guys -- Bulaga is kind of the exception, playing as a freshman, but most of our guys kind of climb the ladder, work hard and end up doing a good job.

**Q. A few years ago you had a similar situation to Saturday's triple overtime, and that was at Michigan State when you were down three and went for it on 4th and 1 and Shonn Green got stopped on that play. I know it's**

**bringing you back a few years, but did that situation have any bearing on maybe what you decided to do, or is it the kicking game back then versus maybe today?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we were out further. To me that was the clear thing to do. This one, you go to -- there were several arguments going through my mind, but at the end of the day, I thought we'd get a stop, be able to keep them out of the end zone. I misjudged that. Live and learn.

**Q. Going back to Iowa State, it seems their situation with the Big 12, it seems to be more perilous than ever. I guess my question is should Iowa State lose its automatic BCS qualification? Should it find itself without a seat at the table, do you think that would have any effect on the series between you guys?**

COACH FERENTZ: Just my initial reaction would be no, but no, that is so far -- that is so hypothetical, and believe me, I'm not -- I just would envision us playing them from here on out, and I have no idea what the future of that conference is, what their future is. I don't know if anybody can answer that right now. I can promise you I'm not worried about it right now. I'm more worried about our practice this afternoon.

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