

October 23, 2012



An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: We've put that thing to bed Sunday and moved on now, and trying to get ready for a very good Northwestern team. We go they are 6-2, playing extremely well. The two losses they've had have been excellent teams, and they've had fourth quarter leads on both of those teams.

So they're a good football team, and like always, very good players, very well-coached and pose a lot of problems for you. We'll start that work today. So that will be a big challenge for us, and we'll get to work this afternoon.

Q. Brandon and Donnal both out?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they're both out. They'll be done for the season.

Q. Will you talk about Scherff, now that he's gone, how important was he to the offensive line? You guys seemed to run right an awful lot.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's an excellent football player, a young player, played a little bit last year. He's improved every week. So the good news is he's got a couple years left. He's got a great attitude. It was disappointing, certainly. Most disappointing any time a player is injured. They work extremely hard 12 months a year to play 12 games. To have that taken away is really a hard thing.

But his attitude was tremendous Saturday night, everybody saw that in the stadium, saw him Sunday right after he got that thing repaired and his attitude is going to be better. He'll bounce back. Anytime you lose a good player, that's a significant thing. And Andrew Donnal is another guy that's come on and done a good job for us. It's

tough to lose good players, but both of those guys have a couple of years left, so we said there is a positive side to it.

Q. What will those specific injuries end up being?

COACH FERENTZ: Brandon's got a broken bone, and Andrew's got a knee injury.

Q. Is MacMillan a definite left tackle or is the competition ongoing this week?

COACH FERENTZ: We've lost two good players out of that group. I don't even know how many guys have played this year, 7 or 8, something like that. So it's minus two from whatever we've had that have played, and Nolan was the next guy in the other night, but did a fairly good job in a tough circumstance. And Blythe had to come in. He has played. He's hardly a veteran player, but he'd be a parallel to Bullock in terms of we look at him as a guy who has played.

And after that, we'll see where we're at here. Try to get guys ready, guys like Conor Boffeli. He's been fighting through some injuries. Walsh was injured earlier. We got him back now, so we'll just go with what we have and see what we can do.

Q. Could Tobin be left tackle?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, if he doesn't start, he'll have to be the back-up. We're pretty much out of guys unless we dip into the freshman class. So basically anybody can practice right now. They have to be fairly multiple, not everybody, but a lot of guys have to be fairly multiple in what they do.

Q. Is Ryan Ward a possibility?

COACH FERENTZ: I'd rather not. With the freshman offensive line, we'd rather not dip into that pool if we can avoid it. But he gives us some flexibility in practicing. The pool got a little shallow,

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so he's moved up the charts.

Q. Has Damon been cleared again?

COACH FERENTZ: He is cleared to practice full speed this week, but we've got to get him into the game Saturday.

Q. Is Canzeri or Malloy, are they kind of on red shirt duty right now?

COACH FERENTZ: Malloy, for sure, if we could. It changes week to week, as you know. Two weeks ago he was on the cusp, both he and Jordan were on the cusp of going into the ballgame up at Michigan State. It's just the way it's been this year.

He's practiced with the ones and twos and has done a nice job. Jordan had a good week of practice last week, and the opportunity to get in there just didn't arise. So we'll take it week by week, but they're both working with the first and second groups and we'll see how things go. It's been a tough, tough area to predict.

Q. Mark has given Northwestern an aspect of their offense that they haven't had recently with that power speed run game. Can you talk about what he brings not just as a running back, but as a return man?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he's really a dynamic player. He first showed up I believe it was two years ago, his true freshman year. He's out of the Houston area. We looked it up because I was curious what he's doing on special teams. A lot of it is coverage, covering off and doing some great things there.

So he's been a spark for them going back to his freshman year. Now he's run into a role where he's done a great job certainly on special teams. He's a really dynamic returner. Took one 80 yards the other day, I believe it was in the third quarter against some pretty stiff competition. So he's a guy that you better have accounted for no matter what the phase of the game is. If he's the one on the field, you need to really try to keep him contained, because he's a very tough player to defend.

Q. What about Kain Colter? They play him all over the place. What kind of formation do you guys need to do on defense to watch him?

COACH FERENTZ: Every time you play him, there is a different set of challenges it seems. This year it's a little bit different. You've got a guy

like number five who can really do some things, and then Kolter can hurt you playing quarterback. He can hurt you playing receiver, and you're not quite sure where he's going to be.

So it really makes it just add to what you're trying to do preparationwise, because they have morphed a package for him that's been pretty good, pretty productive for him. You've got to defend a lot of different things now. That's kind of always the case. It's just a little different package than maybe we've seen before.

Q. How different are their two quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: They're very different. Colter's really athletic, I wouldn't describe it as a wildcat package, because he'll throw the football. But basically he can hurt you throwing it, running it. From the quarterback position they put him at receiver, and he can hurt you there. So you've got two guys right there that you really have to take into account. They've got other players too. So it's not like they're void of talent.

One of their receivers ran right by a corner yesterday for whatever it was, a 26-yard touchdown, I think. But there is nothing fancy about it. Just a guy running fast on the field. It was a nice, nice run and catch.

Q. After seven games, how do you evaluate the quarterback play and the passing game as a whole?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it wasn't good enough to win last week. It was good enough to win the week before. It's about as simple as that. What we're focused on is what's in front of us right now. So we'll go back to work today and see if we can't come up with enough points and yardage and that stuff to be successful this week.

Q. What are the things specifically that you're looking at?

COACH FERENTZ: Protection, route running, throwing, catching, same old stuff. Things don't change a heck of a lot.

Q. Do you want James looking for the quick pass? Looking for the three to five yard route?

COACH FERENTZ: It depends on the play. Every play, obviously, you have some plays that are intended to go down the field, some that

aren't. It just depends how the defense plays too. There are a lot of things that go into it. It's like anything you do. Run game isn't a lot different.

Q. How far ahead of the other quarterbacks is James?

COACH FERENTZ: In terms of? I don't know if I can quantify that. He's our starting quarterback, if that's what you're asking. We all believe in James. I think I speak for everybody involved in our program, team and coaches.

Q. I think it's called an arm-chair quarterback for a reason. That's when an offense struggles, people point to the quarterback.

COACH FERENTZ: It is hardly a new phenomenon.

Q. In terms of the reason, what does it take for you to sit James?

COACH FERENTZ: Generally most of my decisions are made on what's best for our football team. Be it the offense, defense, special teams, collectively. If it comes to a point where I change my mind, we'll change whatever. Be it a position, the way we do things, whatever, but that's what we do. We try to figure out what's best for us at any given point and go from there. So that's kind of where we're at.

Q. Why did you not play another quarterback when you were down 31-0 just for game experience if nothing else?

COACH FERENTZ: I guess you could make an argument that it would give the next player experience. But at that time, I felt like the best thing to do was keep our offense out there and let them play.

Q. What kind of quarterback is Jake Rudock?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's got the potential to be a good quarterback. You guys have seen him in practice. I mean, he looks like he did in August with the open practices. I think he's a good thrower with good command and works extremely hard. He's a lot like James Vandenberg in my mind. He's got all the characteristics that give a guy a chance to be a good player. He's into it, very smart, very competitive. He throws the ball well. You know, he's going to be a good player.

Q. Has he pushed James Vandenberg at all?

COACH FERENTZ: Pushed him? Figuratively or literally?

Q. Has there been any real competition at that spot this year?

COACH FERENTZ: I think there's been competition in a lot of spots. But we're trying to make a habit of getting our best guys on the field, the guys that we feel give us the best chance to win.

Q. Is Jake Rudock ready? Is he ready to play?

COACH FERENTZ: We won't know that until he starts playing. That's usually the million dollar question.

Q. When you said he's like James, is he kind of where James was at in 2009? Is that a fair comparison?

COACH FERENTZ: No, what I meant is he doesn't run a 4.4, 40, to my knowledge. He's a similar type throwing quarterback. He's a smart quarterback, I think. Has great work ethic, like James does. I think he's a tough kid like James. I guess in that way I think they're a lot alike.

They kind of look similar build-wise and all that without getting real specific. Yeah, he's out of that mold, if that's the right word to use.

Q. In '08 you went back and forth until you settled on Ricky. Then the gap was more narrow. Can we assume the gap is a lot wider between James and the guy behind him right now? Is that where we're at?

COACH FERENTZ: Any time you see players rotating particularly at that position, because it is a little unique, that would indicate, yeah, you think it's really close. There is usually a reason why you do it. At that point we're trying to determine who our best quarterback was. I think it's fair to say we weren't certain at the beginning of that season. You know, turned out that Ricky ended up being the guy.

Q. How much involvement does James have in formulating a big game plan with Greg? He's a fifth year senior. He knows the scenario better than the younger guy?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, player input is

really important to us. First of all, what we try to do is take into account what we feel our players can do best in terms of their abilities, what our injury situation might be, et cetera, those types of things. Then you try to formulate a plan out of whatever your system may be that fits those players. Then you have to match it against your opponents also.

So there are a lot of components there. But certainly you try to take into account what you think the players can do best at a given time. Then on top of that, you have a player like James who has played. I don't think it's uncommon for any quarterback coach or coordinator to want to encourage some conversation with a player -- hey, how do you feel about this? How do you feel about that? Not that they're making the plan, because they're not. But getting input is always healthy from any player on a variety of topics, but certainly game plans I think from the quarterback - it's a good thing to do if that quarterback's confident and has a grasp of what's going on, which certainly James does.

Q. Have you had any experience during your coaching career that's really shaped your attitude toward a quarterback and what he needs to do?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. It's clearly cloudy. I'll just say this, to evaluate what happened Saturday, any one player's performance or job status, that would be tough to do. There wasn't much that went well. To try to say that it was one person or one area I think would be missing the boat. It was a thorough beating we experienced, and we played a team that really played well. We didn't come close to matching their tempo or their execution.

I'm sure we've had worse beatings, but I'd have to go back to '04 to remember a game like that. To be reactionary to that one game, I think would be -- at least based on what I saw -- I think it would be a mistake. That's my feelings. We're going to get back to work today to see what we can do.

Q. Does that extend to coaches coming out of Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, the blame or whatever you want or responsibility lies at my feet. That's pretty simple. It always has, always will. So for whatever reason we weren't nearly as ready to play as they were. I think we were ready to play. We just didn't play nearly as well as they did. It's about as simple as that.



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If I could tell you why, I'd let you know. I'd go back to '04. If I could tell you why that happened, I'd let you know that too. But those things happen. Anybody that competes, that happens, so you move on.

Q. Do you worry about James' confidence?

COACH FERENTZ: I worry about everybody's confidence. We just got trashed. We got nailed pretty good. Conversely, the week before we had a pretty big win. At least we thought it was a big win. Then you worry about overconfidence. So coaches worry about everything all the time.

Q. How important has Micah Hyde's play been this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Micah's playing really well for us. Which we expected. A senior player, a veteran guy, he's doing a great job.

Q. Is he the kind of player that you look to lead the team and defense?

COACH FERENTZ: He stands for what you hope a player would stand for. He embodies the characteristics that you like to see in a football player. First of all, he loves playing, loves practicing, loves everything about it. So those are all positives. That's something that tends to have a good effect on his teammates and something if a player has those characteristics, that's a real extra benefit and an attribute.

Q. How do you see affect his teammates?

COACH FERENTZ: It effects them in a positive way, and that's what good players do. We have a lot of guys like him on our team.

Q. You go to play Nico Law in the second half. How would you evaluate his performance?

COACH FERENTZ: He did some good things and he made some mistakes too, which you would expect from a player that hasn't played a lot. So it was a learning experience for him. We'll see how he practices this week.

Q. is the depth at safety between Nico Law and Tom Donatell closing?

COACH FERENTZ: Tom's our starter. It

was pretty close. At one point, Nico got hurt, so when guys get hurt, they lose ground typically, at least guys that haven't played especially well. But we've got a lot of competitive situations on our football team right now.

Q. Was it hard for Nolan MacMillan to come in straight off the bench after sitting out 20 straight games?

COACH FERENTZ: It was a hot fire. It was a really good front. We knew that. They had it going, and we didn't. I've been involved in games like that. It's not fun as a coach. It's a challenge for players certainly.

I think he did a good job. He went in there. He was ready. He was mentally ready for it, and he's practiced well. He's missed some time but he's practiced well when he's been out there. Now hopefully we can keep him healthy, and keep him advancing because we're going to need everybody's best effort now.

Q. What about Nolan's injury?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he had a big mitt or club on there, and it's one of those deals.

Q. What is Weisman's status for this week?

COACH FERENTZ: I think better than last week, certainly. We felt like he was good enough to play Saturday, and that was a day-by-day thing, and that's really hard to judge. So unfortunately he was able to make it back, so he gets a lot of credit for that, and medical staff did a great job. I think he's further ahead than last week, and hopefully he can do a little bit better this week.

Q. Can you talk about the way Keenan Davis has played and has he progressed the way you would hope he would progress?

COACH FERENTZ: I think overall he's playing his best football since he's been here. That's what you hope for with a senior player. I think he's done that. I think he's worked hard. He's improved in a lot of areas and given us some big plays. Certainly the game was over for all practical purposes the other night, but it was a nice play that he made on the kick out to him and a good run after the catch. So that was encouraging just that guys are still playing. It was encouraging that we got the field goal block. It was hardly a turning point. There were a few positives out there, and that was certainly one of them.

Q. Have people minimized the loss of Marvin McNutt?

COACH FERENTZ: I can't. We've lost a lot of really good players. It's college football. When a guy graduates or leaves, you have to replace them. It's just part of football.

Q. It seems like that was some of the variables with McNutt graduating?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, there are a probably a lot of variables. But that's certainly a variable. Just any player that's really had good careers, when you lose them, which in college football you're going to lose them every year, it's just part of the deal. So it's a whole new equation every year, and basically every week in some ways. It's a different challenge every week.

We don't have a lot of time to sit around and analyze those things right now. We're just trying to move on to our next challenge.

Q. Marvin seemed to be effective on fade routes. Do you feel like you have a receiver who can run those types of routes?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we've had some of those, yeah. We had some bad games too when he was here. We've had bad games. This is no foreign territory.

Q. Do you ever feel concern about going up against a hurry-up offense that Penn State used?

COACH FERENTZ: You always have a concern about any challenge thrown at you. We have two more of those. We have back-to-back. All three of those teams are leading the conference in plays per game. So if there's a good thing in there, we have a string of them together. That's part of it. You just have to adapt. I think the thing that affected us more was their execution the other night. It was really good. Their quarterback played lights out. We have a lot of respect for him going in. But I won't speak for them. But I can't imagine he's played better than that.

It's a neat story. He's done a great job playing well this year, and I think they've got a lot of good leaders on that team, and he's certainly one of them.

Q. Have you seen any of those offensive looks in film or other places?

COACH FERENTZ: We've seen it. We'll

continue to see it. Their personnel, for the most part, doesn't resemble what Northwestern does. But there are concepts and things that people do that are carryover and that's football. There is nothing new there. If it's the way you execute that really counts, I won't say they're flawless, but they're pretty good.

The catch that the guy made on the boundary, good luck defending that one. That was pretty impressive. Sometimes guys make plays. That's part of football too. That was a good play against a good player.

Q. Are you surprised Northwestern ran the ball over 200 yards?

COACH FERENTZ: Any time somebody runs the ball successfully, that's not a good thing. I won't say I was surprised, but it was disappointing certainly.

Q. Is it more of a hassle traveling to Northwestern and having to take a bus to a heavily populated area?

COACH FERENTZ: Maybe relative to pre-9/11, perhaps. Because in the old days you'd go to the airport, get on a plane and be there. Although going to Chicago is never easy. Because any time you're flying into a metropolitan area, it's always a challenge getting through the airport. But now with security and all that stuff, I don't know if taking a plane is any great treat.

I think in a lot of ways getting on a bus is almost therapeutic. It gives you four hours where you're not totally out of touch. Nobody's out of touch anymore with technology. But at least you're here, it's four hours where everybody can relax and enjoy the ride.

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