

**November 20, 2012**



An interview with:

## **COACH FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, first of all. We'd like to pay tribute to Tommy Thompson sitting right here. 750th game Saturday, correct? That's pretty impressive. So congratulations on that. Then also the recipients of the Heroes Awards. I think certainly the partnership with Hy-Vee has been great. Better yet, the concept behind it, the recognition now that they're getting four citizens from four states, I think that's certainly tremendous. I just want to recognize them.

Our captains this week will be the same. We have James Vandenberg, James Ferentz offensively, and on defense, Micah Hyde, James Morris. Obviously, we have a short week here, so things are happening quicker for us. We've already got a practice under our belts and certainly a busy week. Getting ready for an excellent football team. Then on top of that, it will be the last game for our seniors.

We have 19 seniors that are outstanding young people and it's a great group of guys. All good stories in their own right. Certainly the time seniors put on their uniform for the last time, it's a special day and last time in Kinnick so that adds to the significance.

We've got a big challenge on our hands playing Nebraska. They're 9-2, as you know. Won five straight games now. We've seen them throughout the season on our cut-ups watching opponent film. They're an excellent football team and really strong in all three areas. Very good skilled players, big, physical group on their offensive line, tight ends. They've got three guys that play a lot and do a nice job.

Defensively they're very well coached, very active, good on special teams, excellent

kicker, good return guys. Overall they're just a very talented football team that's well-coached and playing very well. That's evidenced by their record. The other thing of note, probably, the biggest difference is I think, their quarterback is playing at a higher level than he was playing a year ago. He was playing well last year.

So they're a very good football team. It's going to be a big challenge. We've got a lot of work to do, and we'll continue that work this afternoon.

**Q. In the past when you've had bowl games and you've had that preparation. You use that time to develop younger players. Does not being able to go to a bowl, does that change your approach for how you look at Friday in terms of wanting to get some of those guys a little experience?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, we'll approach this game like we would any. We'll do our best to win this game. I didn't want to alter who goes in and that type of thing. We'll play the guys that give us a best chance to win, hopefully. You know, it is a matter of record we're not going to a bowl, so we'll lose significant practice time. So that's one more thing we'll just have to overcome.

**Q. How did Mark Weisman bounce back from Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: Pretty well. He's a little sore. But he got through the week pretty well last week. Didn't really have a major setback on Sunday, and worked last night. He's sore, but he's going to be that way through Friday. But he's in good spirits. We anticipate him being able to go.

**Q. Did you expect Damon back as well?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not as optimistic there. He didn't do anything last night. Worked out a little bit Saturday before we went out. It's just

a contusion. There is not a lot anybody can do for him. It's just one of those deals, kind of a weird deal, but nonetheless, we've had a few weird deals.

**Q. When you think Nebraska football, what are some of the first things that come to mind?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, it's different stages for me. My first game as an assistant here was back when they had it cranking pretty good in the late '70s, early '80s, and that was certainly one period. Then when I got here in '99, they were ranked in the Top 5. I can't remember if they were second, third, first, whatever, but they were ranked pretty high.

They had it going, obviously, very well. Then in the middle portion of the last decade, they slipped a little bit. But they're back playing the way you remember them. They were always good on defense. I don't know how much was talked about back in the glory days. The way they played defensively, I think a lot. The black shirts and all that stuff, so they're playing really well on defense.

I don't know if it was by design, I assume it was, but offensively, some similarities to what we saw in '99 and 2000, and certainly back in the '80s, a really athletic quarterback that's developed into a good passer. One thing I was remiss in saying, they've done an excellent job. Burkhead is an excellent football player and he's played on a limited basis. So that makes it that much more impressive in what they've accomplished thus far.

**Q. Hitchens back practicing with you guys?**

COACH FERENTZ: He practiced last night. All the linebackers were on the field practicing as far as I know they made it. We had a medical meeting this morning, so hopefully thumbs up on that one.

**Q. What did you learn from the short week last year that you're using now in terms of how to structure the week?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think for the most part we had a good plan, and we just tweaked one or two things. Nothing major. Couple things we made notes of after the game. So we'll make those adjustments and know more Friday, but for the most part, I think we had a good plan.

**Q. Would you be okay with this game continually being played on Black Friday years**



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**ahead or would you like this to be back on Saturday?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's something we'll talk about. It was a mutual decision on the front end a couple years ago. It was a two-year agreement, so we'll look at that and ponder a few things after the season. That will be one of them.

**Q. What affect does Rutgers and Maryland have on Iowa football?**

COACH FERENTZ: I haven't had much time to think about that. I caught wind of it like everybody over the weekend. I think it was floating around out there in cyber space. It has materialized into becoming a reality here in the last day and a half. So I haven't thought much about it. They're not on our schedule until at least '14, so we'll see.

**Q. Does that open up recruiting doors out there?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know if it helps or hurts, really. It might be better for them than us. I don't know. But it's a sign of college football, sign of the times. It's where we're all going, it seems like. One thing that seems inevitable is change. It's going to happen.

The thing I would say is change has been good for the conference going back to Penn State, certainly Nebraska; and the people making those decisions, starting with Commissioner Delany, Presidents and the athletic directors do a great job on that. So, you know, so I wasn't involved in the decision making, but I think there are a lot of good reasons to do this.

**Q. Is it just a blip on the map and you don't care about it? Some of these trips are starting to become NFL-esque.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, my wife commented on it. We had our wives' trip this past week. It was a noon kickoff, and by the time you get home it's, whatever it was for her, 7:00, 7:30, 8:00. They're long days. That's just part of the deal. Going through security at airports has made it a little bit more interesting. Anyway, going Morgantown to Lubbock, Texas, will be an interesting trip. And it will be interesting going Morgantown to Lubbock next year. So I think it's all part of this changing times.

**Q. As a student-athlete, how does it**

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**effect your schedule?**

COACH FERENTZ: Basically what it does, it shoots your Saturdays and if you're on the road. If you play the night games on the road, that's a whole different dimension. But I've always looked at our sport and figured you're on the road four or five times a year as opposed to what basketball athletes and the other sports go through, so we've got it pretty easy on the travel part of things.

Makes you appreciate driving on the bus, getting there, playing, and coming home. Buses don't have to go through security and all that type of thing.

**Q. Are coaches kept completely in the dark when these high-level moves are made by commissioners and athletic directors?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about completely in the dark. The commissioner has always been good about sharing what he can share. But I worked in Cleveland and my boss said it really well one time. He said there are things that he can't share with us, and he also said in addition, there are things that you're probably better off not being informed on or included in, and I would throw this in that category on that.

Commissioner felt like it was important to ask, and you can't check with everybody about everything, and I wouldn't be able to add much to that conversation. I don't know how many coaches would. This is kind of a big thing, a little bigger picture deal. So, like I said, he's done a great job of providing our conference with great leadership.

**Q. Commissioner Delany yesterday was asked about nine versus eight conference games. What do you think?**

COACH FERENTZ: I just think the math is weird. I'm not thinking much about this, but any time you talk about a competitive advantage of five home games, four away, or vice versa, I'm not sure that's a good idea.

**Q. I know you talked in the past about going to a 13-game schedule?**

COACH FERENTZ: I tell you, where we are, I don't know. I'm trying to figure out how we can get 13 guys on the field against Nebraska and not get caught. If you have any ideas on that one, I'm all for it. But I have no idea where we're going.

**Q. Does Nebraska feel like a big rivalry game to you?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, and no. We made that comment when they had joined the league. It was great for the Big Ten, but selfishly a border team joining, that made perfect sense. I think it's going to grow into that.

The reality is we played late games in the late '70s, early '80s, late '90s, 2000, this will be the second of two. So it's really in its infant stages, I think. But all the makings are there for this to be a really good series.

**Q. Trying to build a rivalry with Nebraska, adding more teams means playing other teams less?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, all this expansion stuff, I haven't thought much about. So I don't know how it's all going to shake up. But they'll figure it out. The smart people will figure it out.

**Q. Can you talk about the value of a win Friday as opposed to getting younger players in there? I think maybe some perspective would be to look to the future?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know whose perspective that would be. But from the day we got here, our idea was to play the best we could in every football game, and that's really all that's motivated us through the end of 14 years.

I think in fairness to the entire football team and everybody that's involved in sports, you try to compete and play your absolute best each and every week. Maybe in the NFL it's a discussion when you have a bid locked up and all that.

I'll go back to the year the Giants played the Patriots and all that, '07, I think. The Giants played their best guys and they won the game, and that's what sports are about. You do your best to win every football game and play your best. If it means a senior playing or a true freshman, it really doesn't matter. Whoever is best suited to help the team win, that will be your guiding light regardless of the circumstances.

**Q. When you go into the off-season, is the quarterback position Rudock's to lose since he's listed as back-up?**

COACH FERENTZ: All of you know very well, he hasn't played. To me, every position on our team will be open. Right now we're a 4-7 football team. If we were 11-0 going into this week, starting whenever the new season begins,

it's a new season. There is no entitlement in sports. There should be no cast system or royalty or that stuff. Everybody's got to earn their keep every day. That's just how it works.

It's one of the few arenas that to me competition is truly fair. Nothing's perfect, but at least everybody on our team has an opportunity to start. So it's whether you're a senior, freshman, by next September or August, whenever we open up, hopefully we'll have the guy that we feel gives us our best chance to win playing there.

**Q. He's the back-up now, is that because the other two guys are being red shirted?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's part of it. But if there was a clear distinction, we'll have whoever clearly was the best guy would be the number two guy. We won't know that for a while, probably.

**Q. How much does hanging on to red shirt shape that position, and also the running backs with Canzeri and Malloy?**

COACH FERENTZ: With the red shirts, that position is a little different discussion. With Canzeri, it was a health issue on top of it. Had he been healthy in August, my guess is he would have played this year, but that didn't materialize. There was some strategy in that whole thing. Mike Malloy was more of an emergency valve guy. He had been practicing well, and we've been really on thin ice at that position week to week. Then he was injured last week, so he didn't make the trip. So he wasn't going in the game, I know that, because he was in Iowa City.

In that circumstance, it's a different situation with the quarterbacks. One of the two guys we're trying to red shirt had surfaced as a clear number two. We would have had that guy going.

**Q. How is your staff going to use the coming month as opposed to how it would have used it with bowl prep?**

COACH FERENTZ: If there's a positive here, and you always look for positives, we have more time to focus on recruiting right now, and we certainly have more time to focus on our players, player development, and program development too. So that's really our focus. We don't have to worry about bowl preparation. That's in the books. That encompasses a lot of your time in December. So that's a big void there, so we can hopefully do a better job, more thorough job with our recruiting

and also with player development and program development.

**Q. How do you do player development without being on the field?**

COACH FERENTZ: Just meet with players. There are still a lot of things to be covered. Again, if there is any upside in this whole thing, you don't have that time when you're recruiting and preparing for a game. Decembers are typically -- you're literally on a treadmill basically every day. Probably not giving anything enough attention, quite frankly. It never feels like it at least. Until you get on the plane and go to the bowl site, you never feel like you're attending to the game the way you need to.

That's probably true of recruiting, too, because you're trying to do two things at once. There is always work to be done. In a perfect world, if you could take two days a week in season and visit with your players and have one-on-one visits, but you can't do that. That's not realistic. Nobody can. There are plenty of opportunities to do things and move guys along and help them grow a little bit.

**Q. Looking at the last game for James Vandenberg, I don't think anybody would say he's had the season he wanted to this year. What's he shown this year fighting through that?**

COACH FERENTZ: I would say, and this is cliché, but clichés are usually true. You learn a lot about people in times of challenge. I don't know if anybody's handled it any better than him. It's not gone the way he wanted or any of us have wanted. The season's not over yet, but with one game left, this is not a script I'm sure he would have written. But he's handled it with class, dignity, and shown great leadership skills and has remained very, very positive. Nobody's working harder. So he hasn't changed. I think that's what you hope to see in everybody. Unless you say maybe he's even acted or conducted himself at a higher level. With James, that's what I'd expect. He's a first-class guy.

**Q. Speaking of James, how do you remove yourself from...Are you going to put your Dad hat on there?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, absolutely. I just talked to a writer in Omaha, I guess it was.

For the record, too, I'll just throw this out here. We have five kids and two daughters too, that nobody really counts about. So all of our kids, their mom and dad are very proud of them. All five of them are great kids, and we're very proud of that. James just happens to be a guy on our football team.

So, yeah, I'll be a dad. I've had that experience once. It's a real special thing, and I'll sure every parent kind of feels that way. It's a pretty neat thing to be down there on the floor. I'm down there a lot, but for the parents it's the first time they're really on the ground level. To have their kids come out, it's a really special moment.

**Q. What do you want this legacy of this senior class to be?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think they've already done a good job. I've got a lot of respect for each and every one of them. I say it every year, and I mean this. It's hard to become a senior at any program. What our student-athletes are asked to do and required to do, there is nothing easy about it. They've had to work hard, they've had to persevere through tough times on the field, dealing with injuries, setbacks. We expect them to conduct themselves at a higher level than the rest of the student body from a citizen standpoint.

It's a voluntary activity, so it's not like anybody's asked them to do anything that's extraordinary. But they're held to a different standard, certainly, and they're being evaluated by a lot of people 12 times a year, at minimum. So to run that race and run it the right way, I've got tremendous respect for each and every one of them.

They're all different stories. Some guys played a lot of football during their careers, other guys didn't. Whether it be medical issues or on getting beat up by a player that was playing better. That happens too. So it's just a reality of sports. Bottom line, they've already to me well established who they are, what they are, and really proud of each and every one of them. They're great young people.

**Q. Six of your games have been decided by three points or less. Do you think about what could have been?**

COACH FERENTZ: Afterwards it's more time for reflection. But we knew going in -- well, we didn't know. But we suspect going in that we're going to be involved in close games. That is the nature of our conference, and the nature of our

program. At least the last 14 years -- for the most part of 14 years.

So the better you can handle those close games, the better you can find a way to be the victor in those games, the more successful you'll be. You'll go to bowl games and have a chance to contend for championships. When you come up short, the results go the other direction. That's always part of the challenge. It's something we'll continue to focus on.

**Q. Nebraska can rally from second half deficits. As a coach, what does that say to you?**

COACH FERENTZ: They're an excellent football team. They're resilient. So whatever the circumstance, they've handled it pretty well outside of a couple of early season things. I think they've won five straight is what I said earlier. They're playing with great momentum and great belief.

The week before our Northwestern game we saw that game. I was fresh off that game. It was a great comeback. They overcame mistakes they had made, and that's what good teams do. They put the ball out there a few times and they've been able to overcome that. Says a lot about the resiliency of the players. They're talented, and well-coached, and they stick with what they do.

**Q. Last December you had Rick Kaczinski leave to take another job. What was going through your mind when you found out that he was going to Nebraska to become a defensive line coach there? How do you feel that shapes this game Friday?**

COACH FERENTZ: It really affects the game. Coaches leave all the time. Coaches go from one job to another. It's very common in this profession. I didn't have a lot of thought about it other than to wish them luck. James Dobson went over there too. He's a great young guy, a great coach. It's part of this game. People move.

**Q. There weren't any hard feelings as far as him going to another Big Ten school?**

COACH FERENTZ: People move, and you really can't control where they go. I've said this before: I try not to decide for our staff members what's best for them or what's in their best interest. That's for everybody to evaluate. We've had guys that have had opportunities to leave in conference or out of conference and

chose not to, but that's an individual decision.

At the end of the day, you have to do what's best for you. That's one thing this profession teaches, and I think all professions probably do.

**Q. Speaking of the coaches thing, is any of what happened this year recordwise have anything to do with yourself over other coaches, or is that what you look at later?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's what we look at later. Right now I'm focused on what we can do this Friday. It's something to talk about down the road and I'll think about down the road.

**Q. This Saturday was a little bit of chicken and egg. You weren't getting pressure on the passer. Stuff broke down in the secondary. What has to be cleaned up? Obviously, both?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'd say both, yeah, easier said than done, just because I just don't want to look backwards too much here. But talking about Martinez being a better player, Gardner, when he played quarterback, whenever it was, a year or two ago when we saw him on tape. I don't want to say he was a liability. But right now he's a very dynamic player. We all saw that. They've got tremendous skill players too. So he's mobile. Martinez is mobile.

That's a real challenge when you have a guy that can pull it down and run and hurt you that way, break contain and throw it down the field, which both quarterbacks can do, last week's and this week's. Then have good skill players that can really get open. Nebraska has three excellent receivers, if not more than that. So it puts a lot of pressure on you.

**Q. What is your degree of confidence that this program has better days and better years ahead of it and why?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I believe that 14 years ago. Pick any of our best years, if you want to do that. I can probably list ten things that we could have done better that year too. It's a quick snap shot memory, not looking back too far. But I remember watching the Minnesota game, which felt good in '02. It really felt good. It was great to be there and part of that. It felt good all the way home. But when I watch the tape, it's amazing how many things there were that we could have done better in that game. That's the nature of sports.

**Q. To follow up on Mike's question, just overall, how would you characterize the talent level of your team compared to other Big Ten programs?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're 4-7 right now. That's what we are. So be it talent, coaching, performance, whatever, there are a lot of things that go into results. I'd probably suggest -- I just read an article this morning. It was like mountain and mole hill. Typically it's not quite as bad or quite as good as you think. Again, that's for another day. Right now our focus is playing against a team that's very talented. You could argue as talented as anybody in our conference. You could argue as well-coached as anybody and productive as anybody in the conference right now. Outside of another team that's undefeated.

Point is, these guys are really playing on a high level. They're talented and well-coached and that's our challenge is to get ready for them.

**Q. Since you brought up the Minnesota game?**

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't really bring it up. I was answering a question. But I'm trying to go this way until Friday, but go ahead.

**Q. You have Nebraska coming in, kind of similar circumstances where they have a Big Ten Championship game berth, and they have a reputation for bringing fans. Is that a concern knowing there could be a lot of red in the stands Friday morning?**

COACH FERENTZ: I can't do anything about that. I can just say our fans have been great historically, and they've been great this year and I do appreciate that. I think I said that right after the Purdue ballgame our last home game. Our fans have been phenomenal. Whatever happens, happens. I don't expect there to be a lot of students here on Friday. Maybe there will be. I don't know. It's the first time we've played the day after Thanksgiving. We'll see.

Our fans have been absolutely fantastic, and I know Nebraska traditionally has had great fans too. That's one of the things that makes our state similar, I think.

**Q. I know you talked after the game that the tight ends were not focused at Michigan. Wide receivers, particularly Keenan**

**Davis, did Michigan take them out?**

COACH FERENTZ: The ball goes where it goes. It's usually dictated by coverage. Yeah, it's kind of the way it worked out Saturday.

Really doesn't matter who gets the ball, as long as you're completing it, making yards and making first downs. Hopefully scoring too. That's the biggest thing.

**Q. The amount of respect that you have for James Vandenberg and the way he's handled things throughout his entire career here, does that play into the fact that he's taken every snap this year despite his struggles?**

COACH FERENTZ: No. Basically, there's probably a time that you could make an argument. It was brought up after the Penn State game. It was a decision I made during the game, and we kept all of our starters in at that point. Felt like that was the best thing for our football team. Otherwise we've been trying to score, trying to make points, what have you. James is our starting quarterback right now. I just felt like that was the best thing to do.

I wouldn't dispute all the things you said prior to that. I've got great respect for James. I think he's a good player and a great young man on top of that.

**Q. You made other changes to safeties and stuff during the season. Is it just because of the gap? James is clearly your best quarterback.**

COACH FERENTZ: Quarterback is a little different position than the other ones, typically. It's not quite as easy as, hey, we'll throw this guy out there for a little bit. I guess you can, but that hasn't been our approach. You can argue whether that's right or wrong, but that's been our approach and what we're doing.

**Q. Early in '99, 2000, you were more flexible --**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we didn't have a clear starter. McCann emerged in my mind in 2000, I guess it would have been. Whatever point in that season, and Kyle was a better quarterback at that point than he was in '99, in my opinion, in our opinion. He emerged as our guy. Brad came in, and Brad was a unique person, a unique talent.

We did integrate him in 2001 on a limited basis. We thought there were circumstances that justified that. Then he pretty much ran the race in 2002. Chandler ran it in '03, and Tate ran it in '04.

Yeah, if you have a reason to do something, you do it. If you have a reason not to do it, you don't do it.

**Q. But you don't have one philosophy every season with the quarterback? It just emerges with the roster?**

COACH FERENTZ: Every team's different, and every week's different. It's how things emerge.

**Q. What are some of the things that your program needs to alleviate whatever it is, a five, six-game losing streak.**

COACH FERENTZ: That's something we can talk about next week. Right now we're just trying to not worry about what's happened behind us. We have a big challenge on our hands with Nebraska.

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