

September 2, 2014



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. Captains this week are the same as last week. We've got Louis Trinca-Pasat and Quinton Alston on defense, and Brandon Scherff and Mark Weisman offensively, and Josey Jewell remains out. He will not be with us this week. Hopeful we'll get him back a week from now. We'll see how that goes.

Certainly glad to get the win, start out with a victory the first ballgame. Flip the page now, and now we move on to Ball State who's a very good football team. The last two years we've played Northern Illinois out of the MAC, and I think you know when you're looking at Ball State you're looking at a team that's very, very similar to them in terms of the quality of their football, how they're coached. Coach Lembo has done a great job there. You look over the last 19 regular season games, they're 17-2 just to give you an idea, and that's why the comparison between them and Northern comes in.

They're just an excellent football team, they play well on the road, play well at home, and they're very balanced offensively, aggressive defensively, and aggressive on special teams.

It's going to be another challenge for us, and we're going to need to take a step forward and move forward and improve this week to be ready for another big game.

Q. What are the advantages and disadvantages of maybe setting your backs in specific roles?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, still working that out ourselves. LeShun is probably a little bit more like Mark, and Jordan is a little bit more like Damon or vice versa. We're still working through

that, and we'll just see how it plays out. I think any time you can change the pace, it's probably not a bad thing. There are virtues with both styles of running.

Q. What were the breakdowns on those three big pass plays?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's actually probably more than that, there were probably about four or five plays actually that stand out for about 230 yards. You know, any time you have something like that that involves someone on the front end and also the secondary end, as well, because any time you give up a big play, unless it's just a bomb down the field, which I know none of those were -- it's something we'll continue to work on. It was probably the most displeasing part about the ballgame, giving up big plays, particularly in the passing game, and if we're going to have a good defensive ball club we're going to have to eliminate those things, and that's a team thing.

Q. How did the offensive line grade out last week?

KIRK FERENTZ: They're fine. There's room for improvement, no question about it. I think one of the good highlights were a lot of first-time performers that did a good job. Sean Welsh, mentioning the line, we were all a little worried about how he would do the first time out there, but he seemed very comfortable and performed really well, so that was good to see.

And Jordan Walsh on the other side probably played his best game since he's been here, and that was good to see, too. He has played a little bit more than certainly Sean, but that's the first time he went the distance as a full-time starter and did a good job, too. But we have room for improvement.

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Q. How about Greg Mabin? How did he do?

KIRK FERENTZ: Greg did a good job first time out. I think that was really one of the highlights. I think I'm safe in saying just about anybody who really hasn't played did some positive things. Not that they can't get better, that's for sure, but at least there weren't any just major gaffes or terrible breakdowns.

Q. How much does his size help him? He kind of looked like Bradley Fletcher a little bit.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, he's good size and runs well, so if you can use that, that's a good thing. But it's like running backs, we've had big running backs who were running backs, but we typically play the best guy, but Greg has done a good job working hard throughout the spring and certainly in preseason, so that was a good start for him.

Q. Going downfield a little more, you had some success on a couple plays, one to Willies. Is that a vital part of this team evolving as an offense, to get that into the game?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and I think that'll come. There were a couple opportunities that maybe a little pressure, maybe we didn't see it, that type of thing, so that's part of offense, and typically there's always going to be a couple plays where you say, geez, this was opening up and we didn't get a chance to get there, so hopefully as we move forward here we'll be a little bit better at that and get a few more of those big plays in the repertoire.

Q. Was Jake told to check down?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we don't tell him that unless we're throwing a screen pass, and that's obvious, but -- that's how they're built. They're pretty much a deep zone team and have been, so that's what I said a week ago. Typically their style is to make you earn it and work for it, and I think that's a good defensive strategy personally, unlike what we did. That's a good thing when you can make people drive the ball 10, 12 plays, that's typically a good strategy, and they did a nice job, so we didn't expect many clean shots down the field. Going into the game didn't look like part of the possibility.

Q. Greg has obviously been here a couple years, but I don't know if he had this

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many weapons of this many receivers and the four or five running backs. Is this offense still looking for an identity a little bit now that you have the personnel to go with what he wants to do?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's just like your team, it's always evolving and ongoing, and we're clearly more talented and experienced at the skill positions than we have been since '12. We were really struggling there in the passing game, and part of that is transition, but part of that was just we didn't have a lot of experienced players there. A lot of the guys we're playing right now are guys that were here then. I think Kevonte probably played as well as he's played maybe outside of the Pittsburgh game. He really made some big third down catches, which we're going to need from him. Certainly Tevaun is starting to evolve as a player, and I thought we saw that at the end of the year, and that's what we thought we were hoping we saw in 2012 when we pulled the redshirt.

It's all part of the process, and if we can integrate the tight ends a little bit more effectively, which I think we'll be able to, that should be a good thing for us.

Q. How much flexibility do you have in the wide receiving corps? I know Tevaun and Willies are listed in the same spot but I don't know if that necessarily means they can only play that one spot.

KIRK FERENTZ: More than years past for sure, and that's a good thing because I think we're just a little bit more experienced. In Derrick's case that was his first career catch, and it was good to have him get his feet wet a little bit.

Q. Are there more Division I offensive linemen coming out of Iowa now compared to maybe when you were here in the '80s, or is it similar?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know -- there's ebb and flow, but I think a parallel that I would draw to the '80s and probably the '90s. Although I missed it, guys like Wiegmann and Purdy, just two guys that popped into my mind right off the bat. In the '80s most of the guys we had, at least the Iowa guys, it was us or Iowa State, and usually nobody else. Now more people are involved a little bit. Mike Haight, I think it was us and Dubuque I was told. He got here when I got here. There were a lot of guys that maybe nobody is jumping up and

down about in recruiting, but when they're here for a couple years and they've got the right attitude, I go back to Dave Croston, Walt Fiegel had to talk me into that. I flew up there in January of '82 I think it was, and I liked Dave, but Walt put me over the top on it, and Walt was such a great guy, and Walt was dead-on about Dave, but he knew Dave and he knew what I didn't know as a visiting coach.

But I learned that in the five years we had Dave, what a hard worker and conscientious guy he was and all that. He really -- all of his play from high school and being a freshman, and I think there are a lot of parallels still if you look at the guys that we have. We're still not getting five-star linemen. You're probably more aware of that than I am, but that doesn't bother us too much. If we get the right guys, that's a good thing.

Q. Is it fair to say the offensive line is probably the position Iowa produces most Division I players year in and year out?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, yes and no. I think that's one thing that's really changed since the '80s. I think Mark Bortz is the only defensive lineman that got drafted when I was here in the '80s, and he was a really good offensive guard for the Bears, so he's a defensive -- offensive guy playing defense, but we've had a lot of NFL linemen, defensive linemen, linebackers, DBs, but I think that's changed quite a bit as far as -- but again, that's not the end game. We want good college guys, and if they go to the NFL, it means they had a good career here. That's our deal is finding good college football players.

Q. You had Kevonte last year who got a lot of attention for being a punt returner and then you made that change. It seems unusual, I guess. What was the reason behind that change?

KIRK FERENTZ: We felt like it was the best thing for our football team, and guys compete -- we practice that year-round, spring ball included and bowl practice and what have you. It's not a knock on Kevonte at all. Kevonte played an excellent football game Saturday, maybe as well as he's played, but we just felt based on practice and what we had seen that Matt was probably the better guy to be back there, and the other guy that was right there in contention was Riley McCarron, except Riley got injured during that kids' day scrimmage. When he gets back he'll enter into the discussion, too. But it's not a knock on Kevonte at all, it's just Matt did a little better in practice.

Q. What about Jonathan Parker? What did he show you?

KIRK FERENTZ: Jonathan is one of the guys that has really matured from a year ago. He was a first-year guy who was a good prospect but wasn't ready to play by any stretch, but he did well in the spring I thought, did well in bowl prep and did well in spring and really took another step during August. We feel good about what we saw him doing in practice and felt like, hey, we need to get him in the ballgame and see if he can help us a little bit, and obviously he's fast. He can run."

Q. Can you talk about Lomax's transition?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, I think to me that was huge. Those are the kind of things that coaches worry about, just little things like that, guys playing their first games and really important positions, so it was a good start for him. I think he's practiced well there, and the next step for him is just to be more comfortable being vocal and taking some -- I don't want to say ownership -- but a little bit more command back there, and that's part of that position. It's kind of like being a linebacker or a center or a quarterback. You have to be involved in the communication aspect, and he's certainly capable of doing that. That will come with confidence.

Q. Is that one of the things that happened with the big plays? It looked like there was passing off between linebackers and safety --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we weren't quite there, and usually that's the case, again, unless you can just get a guy beat deep for an over-the-head. Those happen every now and then. But yeah, short throws, long runs, that's just not a good thing. I just had a flashback to Purdue '02 I think it was, where they caught one right across the middle and right up. When that happens, it's hard to feel good about what you're doing defensively.

You know, we know that. We've got to get that cleaned up. I think it was six or seven plays over 20 yards, and three of those being 60-plus yards. So I mean, you wonder how they got 405, there you go, so that's a credit to them. They did a great job. I'm not saying that in a derogatory sense at all. We know where we have to work,

and that's what we'll do this week.

Q. Quinton said after the game that he believed those were correctable, and they look like they are.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and to me it's -- what you worry about is if you don't have the right guys out there, but I think we have good players, and I think it's just a matter of us getting better, and we need to do that in a lot of positions, not just in that segment. And the things that we did do well, we did some things pretty well Saturday. We've got to keep pushing there, too, if we're going to have a good football team.

Q. Bo Bower is a guy that had a key pick and a nice sack. What has he done to elevate himself so quickly?

KIRK FERENTZ: We were very focused on him during recruiting and just didn't pull the trigger on the scholarship. We did that with another guy, too, who maybe we should have. You can probably think of who I'm thinking about. But Bo really just -- we just always liked his attitude and we thought he was a pretty good player, so really happy he came, and he's competed well. This past year he's worked hard. Last fall he really did a good job on the scout team, and that kind of flashed back there, I think about Grant Steen, our first year here was a walk-on from Emmetsburg that was just a pain in the butt on the scout team and just worked all the time and ends up being a three-year starter for us at that same position.

Probably some parallels there, you just see some things in players that they draw attention to themselves in a really positive way, and in time and with good work and all that, they end up being pretty good football players. I'm not ready to ordain Bo, but those were two really nice plays. The interception was a really good play, and those are the things you need to do if you're going to have a good defensive team, so it was a good start for him.

Q. When you get involved with a walk-on, do they have to have one thing that jumps off the page that at least makes you see -- I think with Bo it was probably speed?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, there's always some requisite degree of athleticism, but there's so many other things that factor in. You talk about another guy from West Branch that was a scholarship guy, almost a walk-on, was Marv Cook. I don't know if Marv had any other offer, I

don't think he did, but it wasn't like any one thing about Marv, but it was just Marv, and I think that's kind of how we felt about Bo. The rest was history with Marv. I mean, he was a lot better than we thought he was when he got here. Hopefully it works out that way with Bo, too, but it's off to a good start.

Q. When you talk about Ball State's offense being aggressive, expand on that as far as what were you saying they did that was aggressive?

KIRK FERENTZ: Well, their special teams and defense I think are aggressive, but their offense is really balanced. They looked Saturday like they did last year with some new faces. Obviously the quarterback is new and they graduated a very good receiver, but they've got a couple, one that was hurt last year who kind of stepped into that, filled that void, so they've got a couple excellent receivers, and both their backs were 100-yard guys Saturday.

They're very balanced. They want to be balanced. They've got good play action off their running game. Their running game is really very effective and very strong. Both backs are very productive. So I mean, they looked like they were able to operate the way they want to operate, which was just -- they make you defend, make you defend them in all regards.

It was a good start for them. Like I said, they're very well coached and well coordinated, and then defensively they've got a new coordinator, and it's hard, you only have one game to look at, so it's a little bit difficult there, but schematically looked fairly similar to what they were, and it looks like the idea is to be aggressive with the secondary and try to get up the field on you a little bit and be disruptive with the offensive line.

Q. You just answered this somewhat, but when you played Ball State two previous times in your program they were in a different place.

KIRK FERENTZ: Absolutely.

Q. What have they done to get where they are now?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's interesting, we used to have media guides, you don't get those anymore, so I'm still pulling out that iPad. I don't

know, I think that was Brady's first game in '05, I think. You guys probably know better than I do, Brady Hoke. I'm going off memory, but that was a pretty thorough beat-down on them. They just didn't have a very good football team, and by '08 they were nationally ranked, so they did a wonderful job with that. That program did the same thing down at San Diego State, and then we caught them in '10 where they had dipped again, and now Coach Lembo has come in, and to me I would compare them to where they were in '07, '08 in that upward swing. 17 games out of the last 19, that's a pretty good percentage.

But they're well coached. It looks like their players, and I read a little bit, it looks like they do the same thing, get guys that work hard and have talent that maybe people overlook. They've got guys from California, a bunch of guys from North Carolina, which I'm sure is tied in with Coach Lembo's time at Elon, and they're well represented state-wise, so they've done a good job putting a team together.

The big thing is they're very disciplined, they're very well coached, and you don't win that many games being that way unless you've got the best players.

Q. Are you toying with any other true freshmen playing?

KIRK FERENTZ: No, we're probably about where we were last week, so hopefully -- if somebody emerged, that would be a possibility. On the flipside if somebody gets hurt, which I hope we're not dealing with any time soon.

Q. How are you feeling about how the punters and kickers are performing?

KIRK FERENTZ: I thought it was okay. I know Marshall would have liked to have gotten that one field goal, and we'd feel better about that. His kickoffs were good, and Dillon punted okay. He can punt better, he has punted better, and I think that'll come.

Q. Is that still pretty much open?

KIRK FERENTZ: Everything is open. I mean, you know, everybody's position is open. Guys have to practice well and they've got to perform well, and yet at the same time, and I told Dillon this going in, and Marshall the same thing, it's no good if they're looking over their shoulders. You can't do that. I think it's in fairness to both those guys we've got to let them compete a little bit

and perform, and then we'll see how it goes. But yeah, we assess everything daily.

Q. Is it fair to say that you got where you wanted to go in the running game, 150 yards, I think 4.2 yards a carry?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, and again, I'll give UNI a lot of credit, they had an excellent game plan both sides and special teams, and they did some things that made it a little tough for us on the run game and made us adjust. I thought we did a good job adjusting during the course of the game, but it wasn't the same-old same-old. I mean, they threw a couple of wrinkles at us that we had to discuss and try to come up with some answers for.

They're a good, aggressive team, and they're very well coached. We knew that coming in, we just didn't know what the variables would be.

Q. When you look at the operations center, does part of you tip your hat to Coach Fry a little bit because you were here, too, when the program came, but to be in a position to do that?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for Coach Fry. I've never lost sight of that. I've been really lucky twice in my life. I've been hired by people that had no business calling me -- answering a call. One calling me and then Coach Fry answered a call. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't be sitting here today.

I'm so pleased he was here this weekend. Sounds like it just really went well. Thank goodness we won the game, but yeah, a lot of people have built a legacy here, and I don't if anybody has had a larger role than Coach Fry. It's just been an honor to be here and following him. That's for sure.

Q. Can you compare the bells and whistles you'll have in that versus when you walked in here in '81?

KIRK FERENTZ: This was a big deal when we got here. We were in the old Fieldhouse, our first offices, then we were in the arena and then came over here. I'm in my fourth office now in 24, 25 years, soon to be five. It's a credit to this whole state and everybody involved because this project, the bubble going up, which when it went up, that was state-of-the-art, none of those things happened with ease. People have really backed the program. We had to raise a lot of money to put

this new building up, and I'm just so appreciative, not only for the people that have their names on the walls, but for everybody that chipped in. A lot of people chipped in. That's how things have been done here, and it's really, I think, even that much more meaningful because so many people were involved to make this happen.

Q. Do you go into this weekend thinking maybe you've got to get CJ out there at some point?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I can't tell you when, I can't tell you if it's going to be this week, next week, but it'll happen. It's not a knock on him, but the game the other day was just one of those deals. We'll figure that out, and we've talked about it, but whenever it happens it'll happen.

Q. Do you remember how you found Tevaun, and do you look at -- how do you look at Canada? It's a place do you guys go occasionally or not very often?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure how we got the tape. Ken probably initiated that. He was playing at Avon School I believe it was in Connecticut, and I remember doing the school visit, and I went to school in Connecticut, and we could have been in Germany for all I know. I had no idea where the heck we were. All of a sudden we popped out near Bristol after driving around places I had never been.

Anyway, long story short, he came from Canada there, and somehow we got his tape and liked it, and I'm glad -- he's a tremendous young guy, and he's really improved. We thought we saw something in 2012. That's when we took the redshirt off him and just wanted to get him going, and hopefully it ends up being a great story. But he really played well the other day.

Q. Can you scout Canada?

KIRK FERENTZ: We've got a couple on our roster obviously with Faith being from there. But it seems like more Canadians are coming now and going to prep school. Nolan did the same thing down at the Hunt School. Seems like they're coming to America, playing here a little bit and then getting a little bit more exposure that way.

Q. Seems like UNI was shying away from throwing the ball. Is that something that you see?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know about that. They had a good attack. We knew that. One

thing that's really impressed me about them historically, whether it's a freshman, when this guy was a freshman they threw the ball well. A running quarterback, that no matter who's in there they just play well offensively. So there's a reason they've won as many games over the past decade as they have. They're just a very well-coached football team. They've got good players, and they play hard week in and week out. It's funny if you look at it historically, at least last year, they had a knock-down drag-out with North Dakota State, who's an excellent football team. We all know that. That game was close. Those are two really good teams that were going after it, and then UNI had some injuries. But to me those two teams are really -- we've played a lot of good FCS teams since I've been here. Montana was a really good program and a good team, but those two teams -- we haven't played North Dakota State yet, but those are tough, tough ball clubs. I say this with all due respect to the other ones I've seen on tape, but those two really stand out.

Q. How is the depth coming at fullback?

KIRK FERENTZ: We're working on it. Maybe we'll have an announcement for you Saturday. We'll see. It's ongoing.

Q. What's it been like for you to watch James try to make it in the NFL while you're trying to get a football team ready?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's been perfect, actually, because the nights they've played are the nights we've been off, so appreciate them scheduling the way they have. It's been fun. I'm really happy for him.

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