

December 17, 2010



An interview with:

**COACH KIRK FERENTZ
COACH NORM PARKER
COACH KEN O'KEEFE**

THE MODERATOR: Turn it over to Coach Ferentz.

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. It's a busy time obviously. Jeff Tarpinian medically, Jeff has a shot to play in the game. We're hopeful that he will. It's been a tough year for him. You hate to see anybody injured. But a senior, you know, it's just a tough thing to go through. He's making progress. We're hopeful he'll be able to play in the game. That would certainly help us.

I want to congratulate all the award winners from the banquet last week. That was a nice event. The guys did a great job. Just really pleased for all the players that were recognized. Phil Haddy was recognized, too, for his years of service, and Ron Stang (phonetic), who has been helping us out since the '60s. Some great efforts and dedication there. We appreciate that.

Our guys are in finals right now. We've had a slow week football-wise from the practice standpoint. We'll try to resume tonight. We'll be minus about eight players. I think we have eight guys that have finals this evening. We'll get our feet wet a little bit. I think we have 16 guys graduating tomorrow. So we'll practice with everybody minus the seniors and then have a busy day Sunday and get out of here Monday.

It's been a busy time. It's a good busy. We're eager to just try to wrap things up here and get down to Arizona and hopefully finish our preparation on Missouri.

Missouri is an outstanding football team, 10 win season. 40 wins in the last four years. I think that speaks volumes about the type of football team they have. Gary Pinkel and his staff have done a good job, a lot of good football players. Offensively very wide open. Four-wides, five-wides. The quarterback is an excellent passer and also very good runner, deceptively good runner.

Defensively I think they've given up 15 points a game, which is stellar, a big part of their success. Very athletic at all positions, very disruptive. I think they have 38 sacks. Just done a great job. Are very tough once you get down in there. They don't give up many touchdowns.

It's going to be a great challenge for us, one we're looking forward to. We'll get into that part of our preparation over the weekend.

Q. Will Norm be full speed?

COACH FERENTZ: He's been in the office the last couple weeks daily, has been watching tape getting ready. We haven't had a lot of practices. The ones we have had, he's been out there all the way. Good to have him back this season.

Q. (Question regarding Gabbert.)

COACH FERENTZ: He's big. Throws the ball extremely well, very accurately. They throw and catch extremely well. That's what they do the best. Again, I think the other hidden dynamic that doesn't show up statistically, but he's an effective and dangerous runner. Not like he's a big, plodding guy at all. That's not the case. He's a guy that can run well and is very athletic.

Q. The quarterback, does he get rid of the ball, get it out of there?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, again, what they do best, they throw and catch extremely well. They have a good offensive line, led by their

center. He's a veteran player. They're very efficient at what they do. The system has evolved through the years. I'm going back to where they were more of a two tight end team and ran the quarterback an awful lot. They've evolved into a very good throwing football team. He doesn't hang on to the ball. He knows where to go with it and does a nice job throwing it accurately, too. As a result, they've been proficient offensively.

Q. You look at Ricky's statistics, with the 7-5, it gets overlooked, but his numbers compare to Brad Banks.

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's had a great year. He's had a great career. He's had a good year. We've come up short a couple times at the end. That's kind of tainted a couple things.

Rick is a tremendous individual, works very hard. His statistics are impressive because he's played pretty impressively.

Q. Is Colin Sandeman healthy for this game?

COACH FERENTZ: Right now he is. He's a hundred percent healthy. So that's a good thing.

Q. How much does Sandeman factor in now?

COACH FERENTZ: We've got a void. He will. Keenan Davis will. Everybody will get a chance to compete. Donny Nordmann, Paul Chaney. That's a good opportunity for those guys. Eager to see how they respond to it.

Q. (Question regarding Keenan.)

COACH FERENTZ: I think most of the guys we're talking about are fairly flexible. Keenan is, Colin is. Donny has been more of a split end if you will. Paul has been more of a flanker type guy. Marvin, Colin and Keenan all have the flexibility to move around and I think handle that pretty well.

Q. Who will take Derrell's spot on kick return?

COACH FERENTZ: If we were playing tomorrow, we'd probably go with Keenan back there and also Paul Chaney.

Q. Have you thought about distribution with Marcus being the starter going in?

COACH FERENTZ: We're only playing one game. Right now Marcus will go as hard and long as he can. Paki and Brad Rogers will be the

next two guys in there. We'll be playing it accordingly and see how it goes.

Q. Couple years of really good bowl performances. Have you thought about where your team's mindset is given the adversity of the last three, four weeks, how they'll respond to being on the field in a game like this?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the bowls we've been to, we had one game where we didn't have a good performance. We didn't give ourselves any chance to win in that first Orange Bowl. I think program-wise I hope we've learned from that. I think we have. I can only base it on the practices we've had thus far. The practices have been great. That last weekend we practiced well. We're going to have to because we're playing an outstanding opponent. We've got some work to do to get caught up to these guys.

I think our team is eager. I think they're anxious to play. I think they'll practice well. Time will tell.

Q. You think Big 12, you look at their numbers, they're shutting people down. What sticks out with Missouri's defense?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's a big part of why they've won 40 games the last four years. Usually teams that win consistently, win a lot of games, play pretty good defense. They really do. They're unique. They're like Ohio State in some ways in that they really close to the ball quickly. They're unlike Ohio State in some ways. They're not a direct parallel.

As far as making it tough for you to score, the athleticism they have, some of those kind of things, I think there are a lot of parallels there. That's not a fluke that they've given up 15 a game. That is the most important stat defensively, how many points you give up. If you get it down in there, they do a great job in the red zone. I think they've got to be the top of the country as far as red zone production.

Q. What are some of the other parallels?

COACH FERENTZ: They're tough to score points on. I can't remember it being easy against Ohio State. I can name other people, too. Penn State is pretty tough to score points on. You go down the list.

Ohio State recently has been tough. I

guess forever, not recently. But the difference is, this group almost looks like an NFL group, especially up front. Their guys up front are really prolific pass-rushers. I think 38 sacks they've got. They're unusual. They play a lot of guys. On third downs they'll play their outside guys on the inside, bring in their other outside guys. You have four guys that can really track it down at one time in certain situations. A little bit unique from that standpoint.

Q. Do you present this game to your guys as a chance to get November out of their minds?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think most specifically none of us are really thrilled about the performance in the last game. That's probably the most recent thing that we're thinking about. This is a chance to get back on the field, hopefully play a better game.

Just for the record, I mean, I thought the Ohio State game was a pretty competitive game. A year ago, two pretty good teams that competed hard. I mean, it would have been great to win it. We wanted to win it. I don't think anybody walked away ashamed about that performance. I felt the same way a year ago in Columbus. It's easy to generalize. But no question our last time out we didn't play very well. If we don't play better we'll lose by 40 in this one. It won't be pretty.

Q. Do you expect any health coming back to the linebackers?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's end of the year. We got a lot of guys that are still a little bit nicked up. We're trying to be smart about how we practice with those players right now.

It's the end of the year. All that being said, I think this time off's been helpful. I can't guarantee that Jeff will be ready to go. Hopefully everybody else will be. Obviously Tyler Nielsen won't be. He's done.

Q. How about Gettis and Nolan?

COACH FERENTZ: I think those guys are gaining ground. They were a little bit rusty last weekend. They've missed so much time. I think realistically to have it help our depth, we're right down to the nubs here at the end of the year.

Q. Can you talk about freshmen all-American honors?

COACH FERENTZ: It's interesting. I don't know how many games Nolan played.



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Q. Six or seven.

COACH FERENTZ: Seriously? Actually started? I lost count of that. Those teams lose credibility a little bit if that's the case.

When he played, he played well. I just can't remember how many games he started.

Q. Started six.

COACH FERENTZ: Did he really? Wow. That's sixth one he didn't last long. Just didn't seem like he played. Probably my mind. That's half the season, I guess.

You know, probably the morale of the story, they have a hard time finding offensive linemen who are freshmen to make those teams. All that being said, Nolan wasn't scheduled to start at the front end of the season. Adam sprained his ankle. I really thought Nolan was playing well and gaining ground each week. We're very excited about his future. James (Morris) got thrown into the Penn State game, responded really well. I think his future looks bright, too. That's very helpful. It's something we feel good about.

Q. (Question about blaming the offensive coordinator.)

COACH FERENTZ: It's a pretty old game. I don't know. I've lost interest it. I'm sure Ken was a hero after the Michigan State game. I'm sure all of us were. It's been different since then. That's football.

Q. Your schedule out in Arizona, is it the same as it has been?

COACH FERENTZ: It's pretty much the same routine for us. We'll go get a couple good work days in, then get into our normal game week routine. The biggest thing is for us to get outside. We are limited with our throwing and kicking when we're practicing indoors. It will be important next week when we get down there to have a chance to throw the ball down the field a little bit and kick and punt with a sterile environment. Punting is a little tough in the bubble. So that will be good. It will be good to be outdoors again. We haven't been outdoors in quite a while.

Q. Do you know anything about the practice facility?

COACH FERENTZ: Paul went down, John went down, the advance team. Said it really

shaped out very well. They were really happy about things. We've had great accommodations seems like every trip. I can only think of a couple times where we had any snags at all. Paul thought this was as good a setup as we've had. Plenty of space and what have you. That's great. That's all you can ask for.

It's a great opportunity for us. What a great trip. Get to play a really outstanding opponent.

Q. During this time since the end of the season, Norm was gone pretty much the whole season, I don't know if there's any quantifying what he would have done or meant to your defense being around. Have you had a chance to measure that at all?

COACH FERENTZ: It's kind of like, Can you measure what losing Nielsen meant to us? Was it the same? No. But that's part of the deal. There's no book for this, no drill laid out. I think everybody did a great job of grabbing on, taking care of business.

I'll throw this out there. We played Penn State. I think Norm had just gone to the rehabilitation unit that he was in. I think we held Penn State to three points. It's possible. But over the long haul we're better with Norm, no question about it. So it will be good to get him back and go from there.

Q. Are you still thinking long-term with him?

COACH FERENTZ: Hoping to. Yeah, hoping to. Sure.

Q. Do you have any input on the Big Ten with the names for the trophies?

COACH FERENTZ: Whatever day that came out, that evening, we got something via email. Glanced at it that night. My only observation is, Man, I'm glad I didn't have to be in on those discussions. Those must have been lengthy discussions. I'm sure they've caused a lot of discussions since that time. Not a name on there that wasn't a great player, I'm sure. But then we all could name other players, wonder if they thought about Reggie Roby. Good luck picking two quarterbacks. Go right through that whole thing.

I'm sure it caused some fuel for conversation.

Q. There was a point that Jim Delaney is looking into changing legends and leaders to something else based on feedback. Do you have any response to that?

COACH FERENTZ: This is something I have not thought about at all. That's all I can say there.

Q. What are your thoughts, were you surprised to find out you hadn't played Missouri in a hundred years?

COACH FERENTZ: That was surprising. Phil, Sunday night, whatever it was, that was kind of surprising. Kind of random. We never played South Dakota either, I guess, right? Played most of our border rivals. They do rival at some point, South Dakota.

THE MODERATOR: We'll bring Norm Parker in now.

Q. Norm, where are the cups so you can demonstrate how you're going to play defense?

COACH PARKER: We don't have enough cups and that table is not that wide (laughter).

You know, like Georgia Tech, they're different than us what they do offensively, but they're different in a different way than Georgia Tech's different. They're as different from us as Georgia Tech, but they're different in a different way, if that makes any sense.

Q. Tell us about your thoughts, how you're feeling.

COACH PARKER: Obviously, I took a little setback there. I'm walking more now in the walker. I walked 150 yards which I thought was pretty good for taking off. I've climbed 14 stairs, which can get me in an airplane, I hope.

It's getting better. It's just taking a while. Takes a while to get it done.

I can say this. The people at University Hospital and the people at Mercy in Cedar Rapids, they were fantastic. You couldn't ask for a better experience. There's things you'd rather do. But they were great. They were great.

Q. Feel good otherwise?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, yeah. You know, I come in the office and I stay in the office longer, do that kind of stuff. I'm more involved than I was before, so... But we're trying. When I was

gone, I thought the other guys did a great job.

Q. How much did you miss football when you were gone, the coaching and the kids?

COACH PARKER: I really missed it. The first game I got to come to was the Michigan State game. I was sitting at that game up in the press box and thinking to yourself, This is really where I want to be. This is who I am, what I live for. So there's no questions of my intentions that next year is to be back, to be back stronger and healthier than ever.

Q. Do you hear from a lot of people, strangers, people relating to your situation?

COACH PARKER: Yeah, you know, I've been in football for a while. Between the players, ex-coaching friends, that kind of stuff, there were a lot of cards, get well. You really don't get a chance like you'd like to answer every phone call or answer every card, respond to every card, that kind of stuff. But that's what keeps you going a lot.

Yeah, there's been a lot of that. A lot of that.

Q. Was it frustrating to watch the team playing in the fourth quarter with the defense needing a stop to win it, watching them struggle?

COACH PARKER: You know, that's football. I mean, sometimes you get the bear and sometimes the bear gets you. Really, if you asked me to explain this year, the Big Ten, I'd say it was the year of the quarterback. I mean, I think we got beat and we had trouble controlling some really, really good quarterbacks.

I mean, if you take this league, I mean, you could argue about who's the best. Is it Pryor? Is it Persa? Is it Stanzi? Is it the kid from Indiana? I mean, you go on and on and on with the quality quarterbacks that were in the league, and they were all good enough to beat you. They were all good enough to beat you, you know. These guys are taking the ball and running all over with it.

If I had to explain this year's Big Ten season, it was the years of the quarterback. I mean, I think Cousins is excellent. Stanzi is good. The kid from Wisconsin, Northwestern, Ohio State, the Michigan guy is like a jack rabbit. Every team had a quarterback that was capable of beating you. You don't get that every year.

Q. You're going up against another outstanding quarterback. What stands out about him?

COACH PARKER: Gabbert is big. He can throw. He can really throw. I think his speed is deceptive. He's a good athlete. He's a real good athlete. So he can scramble around and beat you.

It's another quality quarterback. Just a quality guy.

Q. Missouri, without the running backs and receivers, do they probably give you more weapons to prepare for than any team you've seen this season?

COACH PARKER: Well, yeah, and they're different. They're different. They're probably like Northwestern at its most extreme bizarre things. They might line up their tackles and quarterbacks here, put five guys over here, nobody here. They might line up four guys here, core of their offense, and nobody over here. I mean, it's stuff that you draw up in the sand at the beach.

But they know what they're doing with it. There's a method to their madness. I think figuring out the method to the madness is the trick. You try to match up guys on guys. They might line up the tight end here, the running back lines up over there, that's not where they're supposed to line up, they're supposed to line up at other places.

Q. Do you have the raw material linebackers left? You've had so many injuries. Probably don't recognize the depth chart any more. Do you have enough left to go against this effective spread offense?

COACH PARKER: We're going to find out. We're going to find out. Every day a star is born. Today it may be you. Got to look at it that way.

Q. How much of an impact did the injuries at linebacker have at what you guys could do defensively?

COACH PARKER: You know, more than ability-wise, it was all of a sudden this guy is playing a new position, so there wasn't as memory bank as you had. Everything was new to a guy. Then James Morris ends up being the starting linebacker. What, nine months ago he's riding in a yellow school bus, now he's trying to defend Terrelle Pryor in front of 72,000 people on national TV. It's a little bit different now. It's forced

learning. If he makes a mistake, he makes a mistake. It's because he's never seen that stuff before.

Q. You've taken players from Missouri's backyard. Can you tell us how much impact Clayborn has had on the defense, the process of getting him out of Missouri?

COACH PARKER: Well, he came. He visited Iowa. He liked Iowa. I've never really asked him how he feels about playing this game because we've been going through final exams, so we haven't seen the players a whole bunch to prepare for Missouri.

Today is sort of the first day of getting back, Let's worry a little bit about what Missouri is doing. We've been against each other. But it's been Iowa playing Iowa during these first couple practices.

But I'm sure he's excited about it, you know. Should be. I hope he is.

Q. You said this is where you really want to be. Can you elaborate on what you missed so much about it and why you want to keep doing this?

COACH PARKER: Before when I was coaching, it was all about the wins, that kind of stuff. Now it's about being around the guys. In other words, I like to be around the young guys. I like being around the coaches. I like being out of the house. Don't say that too loud (smiling).

I guess it amounts to I really realized what I am and who I am and this is what I like. I mean, this is really what I like doing.

Q. How long do you want to keep doing this for?

COACH PARKER: A long time. You know, I mean, like I told somebody the other day, I've seen these pictures of guys on artificial legs snow skiing. If they can do that, why can't I coach? There are actually days when I have to look down to figure out when I have this prosthetic on which one is the real leg and which one is the artificial leg. It's starting to where it helps you, where it helps having something there. You get out of bed, you don't have the artificial leg on, it's a long fall to the ground. You start to get out of bed, you say, Oh, shit, I only got one leg on, I better get the other leg on.

You don't have to be in University Hospital or Mercy Hospital to find out there's a lot of guys

got it worse than you got it. So quit aching and complaining about it and get moving.

Q. Everybody talks about how coaching is a tough lifestyle in that it's a lot of sitting and watching, hard to find the time to exercise. Do you have an attack plan for keeping yourself healthy, getting back to where you want to be health-wise?

COACH PARKER: Well, I go to physical therapy over there five times a week. They do different exercises, that kind of stuff. But, yeah, there's no question you got to make some time for yourself to stay healthy. That's where I think Kirk does such a great job. Kirk runs. He's in fantastic physical condition because he's smart enough to take some time out of his day where he runs and he exercises. I mean, I think that's why he can do everything he can do because he's in such great physical health. He really is. It's amazing. Our guys go jogging with him. It's like a five-mile sprint. They say, I don't want to run with Kirk today because he takes off and runs, so...

Q. Are you in that group?

COACH PARKER: No, I'm not in that group. There's a lot of places I might die. One of them may not be on a cinder track. I might die on Myrtle Beach, but I'm not dying on a cinder track.

Q. The fans organized the 'Norm, Norm, Norm' chant. What did you think about that when you heard about it?

COACH PARKER: I thought they were crazy. But it was nice. You're very appreciative. You're very appreciative of that kind of stuff happening. I was very appreciative when Sash intercepted it and he ran it for a touchdown. That was nice.

It was nice. The people have been very nice. The people have been very nice. But it's time to get back and earn my keep a little bit.

Q. Have you and Kirk talked about at all where you want to be and need to be health-wise to attack next year?

COACH PARKER: Kirk has just said, you know, Do what you want to do, do what you're comfortable doing. Don't think about quitting or something like that. Don't make any stupid, rash decision.

I'm coming back. I mean, if I don't, I'll be

really disappointed.

Good seeing you guys again. I even like seeing you guys (smiling). Just a case of who wants to hold the urinal. Take care, guys.

THE MODERATOR: We have Coach O'Keefe. Just give your observations on how things are looking offensively and we'll open it up for questions.

COACH O'KEEFE: We basically have had about five practices in preparing for the Bowl. Our guys are working hard. But we're really just working against ourselves at this point. Most of our focus has been on the development of younger guys, the fundamentals that they need to get better at their position, like it always is at this point in the year before we actually get into the game planning of Missouri, which we just basically had started this previous week.

The next three or four practices we have will have a segment built in where we'll begin to prepare like we normally would for our opponent and at the same time take a little bit of time out of each practice to work with the younger guys and develop them the way that we feel they need to be developed.

That's kind of where we're at. We can talk a little bit about Missouri.

They're a very good football team obviously. They're built on speed defensively. I would describe them as a very athletic team, especially their front seven. All their linebackers can really run. Their ends are extremely talented. I think right now, if you look at them from a statistical standpoint, the things that you notice about them most are they're giving up a little more than two touchdowns a game, but they are really stingy in the red zone, not only in allowing people to score, but letting people score touchdowns.

It's probably the lowest that I can remember ever seeing since we played anybody here at Iowa. So we've got to make sure we have a great game plan for them inside the red zone.

They're a well-coached team. They'll bring pressure a lot of different ways. Again, that's part of the reason they've got 38 sacks on the season, as well. They take pride in really playing hard.

Q. What do those 38 sacks tell you? What do you need to be sharp on?

COACH O'KEEFE: Well, number one, you need to know where the blitz is coming from. That's critical. If you know where the blitz is coming from, we've got a chance to get it stopped.

Rick can either change the protection or get us into a protection that can be better for us. Whether it's five man, six or seven man, doesn't much matter depending on the situation.

Part of that has come in the red zone. I'd say a good portion of that has come in the red zone in third-down types of situations.

You know, we've got to be fundamentally sound. They are a quick team off the edge. They'll even substitute where they'll take their speed guys and put them inside, match them up against guys that normally aren't matched up with that kind of speed. That can really cause some issues at times. They use their hands very well. They have great feet.

They're not afraid to play a cover zero or cover one, try to run with you. In their conference, they've run with some of the best athletes there are in college football. They're not afraid of that by any means. That's what they practice against every week as well.

Q. Does this team blitz more than any other team you've faced this year?

COACH O'KEEFE: They'll bring a lot of pressure. There will be a lot of pressure on first down, as well, that's geared to stopping the run obviously. A good portion of it will come from the boundary. Looks like they like to bring their corners, get them involved with some things. They'll jump into some fronts that are going to really force you to have to run the ball one way or throw it another. We've got some work ahead of us to make sure we've got it all covered.

I wouldn't say that they blitz more than any other team that we've seen by any means. At the same point in time they've got their packages, and they're going to bring pressure. They can get in a little bear look that we see from time to time, bring a little more pressure, get their speed guys coming hard up the field.

Q. With this in mind, do you have to take extra emphasis to get your younger running backs up to speed?

COACH O'KEEFE: Good point. I mean, I must have talked about that before at some time. Yeah, we need to make sure that we're all on the same page. Lester has done a great job with that, whether it's been Marcus Coker or some of the other guys in the past of getting them ready to go. If we need to use Brett Morse or Paki O'Meara,

they've got the experience and they know what they're doing in the system as well.

The key is, we're not going to know every time they come at us. Coker has got to be ready to go as well.

Q. How impressed have you been by Marcus since you've thrown him in there as a feature back? What are you expecting out of him in this game?

COACH O'KEEFE: I wasn't sure -- you couldn't be sure what to expect. Now that he's been in some games, you can expect him to run the ball physically and run it tough, which is what he likes to do.

We went back and looked at some of the ballgames that he got a chance to run in, especially the Indiana, the Michigan State, and Minnesota games, he's done a pretty good job of getting where we wanted him to get and moving the pile at times himself when he needed to.

But, you know, this is an opponent that's going to offer some different challenges to him, and one of them is going to be in the blitz pickup. We really like the progress Marcus has made. We feel like he'll continue to get better all the time.

Q. (Question about why scoring has dropped in the last four games of the season.)

COACH O'KEEFE: I think it took us a while to get going at times. We've survived a little bit on some big plays that made a big difference. We probably weren't as good in the red zone in those games as we had been previously, maybe since the Michigan State game probably is what you're talking about.

We couldn't get it going at times for one reason or another. We made enough plays at certain points, but not enough in the end to get it done. We certainly weren't very good in two-minute drills, by any means. As much as we tried to change it up, something always got in our way.

We always talk about, in every successful two-minute drive, you're going to face some adversity along the line. It could be a sack. It could be significant. You've got to just work through it like it never happened and overcome it and keep on marching. We never were able to do that.

Q. When you played in the Cap One Bowl, you were down to the fifth string running backs. Are you in the same dire straits this

time around or is your feeling a little different about where you are at running back?

COACH O'KEEFE: Another great question. You know, I think for that game we had Simmons back, Sam and Simmons for that game. We were blessed with two deep at that point.

But it's probably similar in a lot of ways. Marcus, he's got a lot of experience at this point - a lot more experience than maybe we thought he was going to have coming into the year. On the other hand, we were hoping we'd get him ready faster, even after some things transpired.

I think we feel pretty comfortable.

Brad Rogers is a guy who we have a lot of faith in, if we could get him in the game. Should probably be in the game a little bit more from time to time, as well. He's a big strong guy, who is doing a nice job at fullback, but also has the capability in our offense to get in there and run the zone stuff. He knows the protections well enough, we can keep him in and count on him to pick up any pressure.

But, you know, we feel pretty good about where we're at right now. Could be better.

Q. Is Keenan capable of giving you what Derrell did? You're looking to fill that void obviously.

COACH O'KEEFE: Keenan Davis is a good football player. We're going to find out. We'll find out. This is where guys that have ability or great players begin to emerge, show what they're capable of doing, show that they've worked hard for their opportunities by taking advantage of what they have in the ballgame.

So, yeah, we have confidence in Keenan, number one. Number two, I think there's a lot of excitement that he gets an opportunity. He's going to do whatever he can to take advantage of it.

I can't answer the overall question because, you know, that's like asking again how Marcus would do when you can't be sure. The proof's going to be in the pudding, how he plays, what we do on the field, what he does on the field is going to really matter.

He quietly has made big plays in games that nobody noticed because they haven't ended up in going to the end zone or whatever. But he has done some stuff. I really like where he's coming from in the run game, as well, becoming a more physical guy that can help those backs out down the field.

Q. When the team hits a rough patch, it's the nature of the beast, fans want reasons, point fingers, the offensive coordinator is not immune to that.

COACH O'KEEFE: Just ask my mother (smiling).

Q. Do you check the perception and the criticism? Kirk said he reads everything. Good or bad. Do you keep a pulse of when things are good or bad? Have you ever Googled yourself?

COACH O'KEEFE: Googled myself? My kids have. I haven't done it in a while. My wife will tell me she does this. I shouldn't even be saying this in public. It's too late. She'll do stuff like that every now and then.

I'm going to speak out of both sides of my mouth here. Number one, I really think you need to stay on top of that stuff as best you can. Number two, I never pay attention to any of it because I'm not a public relations guy, I'm a football coach. I don't need to be worried about my public relations. We need to be worried about making the next first down, finding a way for the team to get better offensively. Getting in that end zone, being better in the red zone, whatever it may be that particular week, go back at that, and not worry about everybody's opinion, including mom's.

But I also think watching a lot of stuff that goes on now in the world, staying out in front of that in some ways, in public relations, is great, but I don't think that's necessarily the case in our situation or my particular situation.

Q. Do you have a perception of what is being said, good or bad?

COACH O'KEEFE: I have a perception because I'm around. But I'm not going to spend any time doing that stuff.

Q. Your name was linked to an opening that was out there that since has been filled. Is becoming a head coach again something you thought about maybe doing sometime down the road or are you content with remaining an offensive coordinator for the long haul?

COACH O'KEEFE: That question gets asked a lot of times even in recruiting. I think naturally that stuff will take care of itself if it happens or it doesn't happen. I think the guys that stay focused on trying to do the best job at the job they're at right now are the ones that end up being

successful at what they're doing. That's really all we've tried to do, all I've ever tried to do here.

At one point, yeah, I think I had been a head coach for 16 years. It's been so long now that I barely remember what it was like at this stage. That part of it, I was going to make some snide comment about calling plays off the Internet or whatever. But time flies. It's been 12 fast years. A lot of that stuff doesn't even compute at this stage.

Q. The leading receiver on the team now (Marvin McNutt, Jr.), you got him out of Missouri, can you talk about his progression from quarterback to receiver, and getting him out of the state of Missouri?

COACH O'KEEFE: Eric Johnson did a great job recruiting him. Marvin, I think he might have been All-State in three sports as a quarterback, basketball player and he was a pitcher in baseball. I don't know if they played for three state championships. But he was a highly successful athlete. I think he was offered some Division I basketball scholarships, as well. I can remember going to watch him play. He had a couple of dunks, three-pointers. He was a talented guy.

We brought him in as a QB and decided that we didn't want to waste his athletic ability. We moved him over and started to train him as a receiver. The first thing that had to happen was he needed to get himself in shape. Being a receiver is more like being a basketball player where you have to run that court every play for the most part. After spending a couple years at quarterback where you're only dropping back five, six, seven steps at a time, you know, your lung capacity isn't quite the same as it needs to be when you're running down the field on a post route for 40 yards and you're doing that four, five, six times in a row.

He had to get himself in shape, number one. We always felt he had great hands. The next thing was learn how to run routes. He's a big, linear guy. Being able to get his feet where they needed to be, weight where it needed to be for a great route runner is something Marvin is working on but has improved tremendously. His feet are quicker than you think for a guy that's big. That's why he's able to beat some people against press coverage, especially when you get up and jam him. His feet are good. He's learning to use his hands better as a receiver, getting off the line of

scrimmage as well.

The biggest area he's got to continue to work on is probably no surprise for a former QB, and that's blocking, right? He hasn't had to do that a lot, but he's improved quite a bit. We need to grow there a little bit more.

Q. How flattering is it for you to be mentioned for other job opportunities as a head coach? Does that validate what you talked about?

COACH O'KEEFE: I don't know that it matters. This is something, in college football, you don't have a whole lot of time to stop and smell the roses or think about things until everything's past you for the most part. It's tough to evaluate or even think about stuff while they're going on in the immediate present time because you're preparing for practice, you're game planning, you might have recruits in, you could have a press conference, you might go up and have a staff meeting, get ready again to meet with some recruits, meet with your players, have practice, have dinner with your recruit, all that stuff. It just keeps going.

I'm surprised none of you guys have ever asked to come along for a day at work. People ride around with cops and stuff, police at times. I'm surprised none of that's happened.

Q. We tried.

COACH O'KEEFE: Did you? I forgot. Sorry. What's your first play, run or pass?

Q. Jet sweep.

COACH O'KEEFE: That's good. I like that (smiling).

Q. We see a veteran quarterback in Ricky, guys with experience. We wonder maybe why the two-minute drill didn't go off as well this year as you hoped. What has been the key thing that bogs you down in those situations?

COACH O'KEEFE: The key thing? Making first downs. In a two-minute drill, you have to make first downs. We have examples before a half where we chunked it down the field and did some stuff. Gets a little tougher now depending on where you're starting from and how things start out.

For instance, Northwestern, that was a two-minute drill. I think we had 18 plays. Three first downs is all we were able to make. I think we

had to go to two fourth down situations in order to get it down did there and another third down.

I can't say that I've ever been in a two-minute situation that ever had that many plays in it and you didn't put yourself in position to score. It was a little odd. Everything took place there that you don't want to take place: sacks, dropped balls, bad balls, whatever. I'm sure there was a bad call or two involved in there, as well. But that's kind of it.

We talk to our guys about the two-minute drill. Let's keep cool, stay poised, keep your calm. Let's think about making first downs and conserving the clock. That's really how we go about it. There's going to come a point where you really have to push the ball down the field depending on what's going on. But that's how we'd like to go about it. Make the first downs, okay? We talk to our guys about if you're on the numbers or outside, get out-of-bounds. If you're inside the numbers, get up there and do what you can to get the first down. Get the ball back to the officials as fast as you can, keep moving.

We work on it every week. We work like crazy on it pre-season. We even worked extra time on it here in the back part of the season. But it's all got to be executed.

Q. Are opponents giving you a common look in a sense they've seen, We can do this against them?

COACH O'KEEFE: It's a little bit easier to do stuff knowing you've got to go 80 yards in a minute and whatever. They can afford to possibly sit back and do things. We've beaten more people this year when they've tried to blitz us than when they sat back and tried to drop us off. It becomes a guessing game.

You can use multi-purpose coverages to a certain degree that can help you. But if the defense isn't cooperating, they get in a pattern of using, let's say, three different coverages at different times, you got to be careful about trying to out-guess them. You could end up with a bad call where you can't get what you want out of it. It either has to be thrown away, which ends up being a wasted down, or just becomes a bad completion that doesn't get you anyplace.

Q. Last year you were winning those close games. Coach talked a lot about the five losses. Does the offensive coordinator not get

enough love when those things happen and get too much grief when you lose like three or four there?

COACH O'KEEFE: I don't know about me. I'm not worried about the love factor, but I know it's tough on the quarterback because he's doing everything he can. Those are tough situations to be in. We're counting on him to make all the correct decisions out there all the time.

I don't care if you're a coach or the quarterback, you're always wishing you had a few things back a lot of times. Even when you're winning games, you look at things, We could have done this or that different, wish we did this or that. But you're not saying it the same way as when you lose a ballgame. It certainly feels a lot differently in those situations because it's just kind of how the whole thing is.

Q. How do you react to Joe Fan who runs up to you and says, You need to unleash the shackles in the first half?

COACH O'KEEFE: I mean, again, we haven't gone back through everything. This year more than ever we've taken a lot of shots down the field. If it's working, it's great, you can get a big lead. In some of those other situations we talked about, the games we had at the end of the year, we didn't hit those shots down the field so it took us a longer time to get going. We had to do it the old-fashioned way with a drive or whatever it may be.

I think this year more than ever we took shots. We went into every game wanting to do that. I think the last two years especially. That's kind of who we are. But you've got to make those, otherwise it's second and 10. That means it could be third and 10. If there ends up being a sack, there hasn't been a million of those by any means, everybody has done a nice job, it could be even third and longer than 10.

It all factors in. But you just keep going at it, working for the next play is what you do.

Q. Can you talk about the development of your reserve quarterbacks, with Rick playing his last game, how they developed this year.

COACH O'KEEFE: Well, how do you think they've developed this year?

Q. We haven't seen them much.

COACH O'KEEFE: Right. You're seeing the same thing I'm seeing. Without game

experience, again, you're asking me to comment on something that would be totally practice-based.

James has had a great year in practice. He was a redshirt and no one's hit him. He gets chased around a little bit. He usually has the benefit of seeing what Rick is doing first, can check or read the coverage that way himself. It's kind of how practice is built.

James has grown up a lot, has made himself a better player. He's a better player than he was a year ago, even though he hasn't been in the game. If you're asking me to evaluate him on practice, I would say all of our guys are better in that regard. So where that takes us after that, neither one of us know.

Thank you.

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