

August 8, 2013



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome to everybody. Between Chicago and last week in Connecticut, it seems like this never ends. It's like a caravan right now.

But welcome, everybody. Starting out on a little bit more of a serious note, certainly want to express our condolences first and foremost to Ron Fairchild and his family. Ron as many of you know went to school here, played football here, got a degree in physical therapy and was a longtime equipment manager. I got to know Ron and his family extremely well back in the '80s. Our condolences to Becky and all the relatives.

Also sad for anyone who had a chance to meet Larry Nolan, who passed tragically here earlier in the month. I only got to meet him a couple times, but his work certainly lived outside the arena here and over outside the stadium. He was just a great person. That's kind of a tough thing there.

It's great to get back on the field for us. I think all coaches certainly that's what they enjoy the most, and it's great in that regard. We've had four practices now, and probably like most teams in a America we've got a lot of work to do. We realize that. I think we've had a positive summer. All the feedback has been good and the summer is all about strength, conditioning, skill work, things like that that players do on their own under the supervision of Chris Doyle and the training staff. They do a great job.

Certainly at the end of spring I felt like our team progressed. I thought we were a better team than we were back in November and now we're back to it again and building up to it as we go. Yesterday was our first day with shoulder pads on, so we've had two days of work there, and every

step is a step. We've got a lot of work in front of us. Guys have a great attitude. Our seniors have been outstanding, and we've got a big month in front of us so we're here to take on that work after we finish up with today.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Coach, has there been any movement at quarterback yet? I know it's early. (Luke Meredith, Associated Press)

COACH FERENTZ: It's early, and really there's not -- we have a three-horse race, and we're going to let them compete.

Q. Have you seen anything this spring, any separation, or what have you seen? (Josh Christensen, KCRG-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: Guys are really feeling their way right now, and that's what you'd expect. It was like that at the start of spring, as well, so anytime you jump into a new phase it's just totally different than what they did in May, June and July.

So it's going to take some time and hopefully when I meet with you a week from Saturday we'll know a little bit more about how things are shaping up at not only that position but all positions.

Q. Who's your No. 1 wide receiver?

COACH FERENTZ: Our No. 1 wide receiver, Kevonte Martin-Manley is our most experienced guy certainly outside and then Tevaun Smith moves up at the other position. C.J. Fiedorowicz is part of the passing attack, too. Good to have him and Kevonte back. We'll build from there.

Q. I wonder if you could tell us a little more about Damond Powell, and given the inexperience at wide receiver is there a chance he could see the field? (Luke Meredith,

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Associated Press)

COACH FERENTZ: We wouldn't typically recruit a junior college player unless we felt they had that opportunity, so that motivated us there.

And the challenge is he just got here a couple days ago, a week ago I guess now, and the challenge is how quickly -- just like first-year players, how quickly can they catch up to the speed of what we're doing and then also learn what we're doing. So it's a challenge. It's certainly advantageous to have gone through spring practice. If a guy has done that, that gives him a little bit more edge. That's really why in the next three weeks, we'll know a lot more about that as we continue to practice, but obviously we've got an open mind at every position right now.

There are certain players you just will not expect to get beaten out. The three guys we took to Chicago, if they get beaten out, that would be a story. That would be worth reporting on. It's the other ones that are worth watching right now, and that's what we're interested to see.

Q. How would you rate your offensive line, the depth of your offensive line compared to other years here? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we come into this season more experienced than last year for sure. We've got more guys that have started games, and with that you could even include Nolan MacMillan who hasn't played, hasn't been on the field significantly recently, but we thought enough of him in 2010 to put him out there and he played pretty well. We have the makings to have a good line, and certainly if we're going to have a good football team, we're going to have to play well there. That's just a matter of getting the work done right now.

But I'm optimistic, but we need to continue to develop players and we need our guys that have played to continue to get better. That's critical for them to be any good.

Q. What kind of growth have you seen there? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: Continued growth. We're still young. Last year we only had two seniors, this year we have one, so we're young in that regard. But certainly we're more experienced than we were a year ago. Now we need to show that on the field on a consistent basis. That's the biggest thing.

Q. What kind of an advantage at quarterback does Jake Rudock have just being around the system last year in the way that he was? (Bryce Miller, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: He was the No. 2, or at least he got the majority of the No. 2 snaps last year, so that gives him a head start certainly, but I don't think -- I wouldn't call it major. To me it's not like everybody else is really chasing him. It's not one of those situations. It's like every player needs to take what they do best and use it to their advantage, and Jake does that. He's a smart guy and a good, capable player. That's part of it. But I really think the key thing right now for all three of the guys is what they do in these 20-some practices here before we really get to game week.

Q. What would a Nic Shimonek have to do to enter that and make it a four-horse race? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, based on this morning, realistically the other three would probably have to fall off a horse to have that happen, and I don't mean that as -- we really like Nick, but there's so much going on, and especially you can only imagine the first week. There's no tougher place to play mentally than the quarterback position. So he's thinking about way too much right now, but that's how it is, and every player has to go through that. Certainly every quarterback has to go through it.

If he ended up being the guy, then we would have to really alter what we're doing a little bit and skinny things down.

I don't think any of the three have a decided advantage against each other, but they all have an advantage over him. But all that being said, we really like the way he handles himself. We've been out there four days, and I like the way he handles himself, carries himself. He looks like a quarterback. Now he's just got to put things together, and that's a daily basis.

Q. How would you describe the style or the demeanor of your quarterbacks? (Ben Rosehart, KWQC-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not great on that description stuff. I think they're all three fairly similar in terms of what they do, and I think all three of them are really capable of throwing the football well. They have different personalities like most people do, and it's not unusual for

quarterbacks, but they're all football guys and they work well. They have a good mentality. They work at it hard. They are good with their teammates.

You know, so a little different but not majorly different, and the big thing is going to be how they perform, see if there's a difference there, and right now at least there hasn't been. But camp is a funny thing. It really reveals a lot of things as you go along typically.

Q. Has Brandon Scherff made it all the way back from his injury? (Tom Gustafson, KDSN-Radio)

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, he is full speed. I think Andrew Donnal is probably a little slower behind him in terms of being fully recovered, but Brandon is 100 percent and ready to go. He had a good spring, but you can tell when players miss time, typically you can. To that point Louis Trinca-Pasat is out right now. He missed all of spring practice. He played a lot last year, played just about every play that counted, but he's feeling his way right now and he'll be a lot better here in a week, two weeks or something like that, but Brandon is back and Andrew is doing well. He's functioning fine.

Q. You've got a group of seniors coming in, but when they came in you were coming off Orange Bowl and some lofty success. Can they still draw from that do you think? (Andrew Logue, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: You take good and bad from any experience that you have, and those guys have had that exposure, if you will, so hopefully they can share it. But to that point I think we all find out at a really young age, it's more fun when you win than when you lose, so it's as simple as that.

That's something they can share in their leadership styles, I suppose, but I don't know if it's a major factor.

Q. Is the attitude always the same this time of year or do you sense a little something different with this team? (Pat Harty, Iowa City Press-Citizen)

COACH FERENTZ: You know, every team has got some personality, regardless of what the season the year before was, because it's a new team. We graduated guys from last year, and you've got new guys in the front of the room and guys emerge. They change during the course of a month, let alone ten months or eight months,

whatever it may have been, nine months, I guess. So yes, it's always changing. It's a pretty dynamic process.

But the big thing is since we got going at the end of November, the attitude has been real positive. I haven't seen it waver, so that's a really good thing.

Q. The receiver position as a whole, Coach, can you talk about the depth you have there now and how you see that as an area of possible improvement? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: We just don't have a lot of depth, and we know that coming in. Kevonte is our most experienced guy; certainly Jordan Cotton has played some and done a nice job on special teams, Jordan; Tevaun Smith played last year; Jake Hillyer has played a little bit. So you start with those guys, and then we're just working hard.

But I'd also include our tight ends. I think our tight ends, that is a group where we probably have as much depth at that position as any. I think for us to be an effective offensive football team, those guys are going to have to be involved, and I would say the same thing about our backs. If a guy can help us in the receiving part of it, and Mark Weisman is not terrible, but I don't foresee us putting him out wide, but using him out of the backfield, no regrets there. But if Damon Bullock could help us out there, Jordan Canzeri is showing some things with ball skills that maybe we didn't anticipate. We'll use everybody we've got just like you do every year.

Q. You guys have talked about having an eight-man rotation on the defensive line. Have you made strides toward that and do you have an eight in mind? (Marc Morehouse, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: It's the top eight, whoever looks like it here at the end of August. The good news is we have some candidates, and with all the up-tempo stuff it probably doesn't hurt to have that.

When you have more inexperienced players they'll probably play a little bit more effectively if we can keep them fresh. They've got to earn that on the field. Certainly the guys we saw out there in the spring, plus we add Louis into the next -- I think we have some guys that realistically

have an opportunity to help us a little bit.

Q. Is there anybody you see out there that you might think, wow, wait until our fans see this, this person is maybe a diamond in the rough that's really stuck out to you? (Danny Davis, *Mediapolis News*)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about diamonds in the rough, but it's always interesting, the freshmen, we've only seen them four times, so we're encouraged by the whole group, but they've got a lot in front of them right now, and I say on the road in front of them. They've got a lot of work to do, and they're probably the ones that are least used to what's going to happen over the next couple weeks. It's tough to predict how they'll look here or what they'll do. They'll have ups and downs.

But overall we're really happy with the group. You know, our weaknesses or our lack of experience, that's probably where it's most logical, they might contribute. Plus on the perimeter it's a little easier usually to get involved in the game or special teams if you're a younger player. A little tougher for linemen or on the other side of the ball, typically linemen on the other side of the ball it's a little bit unusual.

Q. Can you compare it to another team you've coached? (Danny Davis, *Mediapolis News*)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if I could do that. We'll see what happens here.

Q. After last season is there anything that was different or unique to this off-season in terms of drills maybe you haven't done before or -- not drills, but workouts that were recommended or conversations you've had with players or really thinking about schemes? Is there anything that was unique to this off-season that you haven't experienced as a coach before? (Bryce Miller, *Des Moines Register*)

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, I think the single biggest difference, and this is 12, 13 years, whatever it be, is just the length of the off-season. If you want to find a silver lining, which I'm always in favor of doing that, we've got a month jump on a lot of our opponents. The month of December we were training instead of getting ready for a ballgame. There's a lot of negatives in that, too. I think they're very obvious.

But if you want to put a positive spin on it, at least we got to work earlier, and as a coaching staff we got some of the stuff we normally do during -- right after the bowl, we got that done prior to the holidays.

So it enabled us to do some other things moving forward.

But in all, I don't think radical stuff. I think it's just kind of a challenge for our football team, doing the things that we expect to do well and doing those well consistently. We didn't do a good job of that last year certainly, and it starts with coaching.

Q. How will the latest stadium renovation affect game-day experience? (Eric Doughan, *UITV*)

COACH FERENTZ: That's a great point, and I skipped over facilities. We have a lot going on obviously in the building, next to the indoor. Second phase of the operations project is really exciting. It's great to see steel going up. That's always encouraging. I think everybody is fired up about that.

And then the scoreboard thing, the impact of it really kind of hit us. We had camps out there in June, and the first time we were down on the field surface, the game surface looking up there, I had no idea how large that was going to be, and it really does feel different. So if you haven't been in the stadium, when you get a chance to be in there, it's going to feel very different. It almost encloses that north end zone.

I can only imagine -- I really didn't pay attention to when we go on -- I'm not tuned into HD and all that stuff. That's great for fan experience. It's going to be really nice, but it's also going to make it even more, I think, compact and probably louder in there, so that's a fantastic thing. It'll be good for the fan experience.

Q. What about recruiting? Does that help with recruiting? (Tyler Tjemeland, *KGYM*)

COACH FERENTZ: It doesn't hurt. Just look around the country. It's an arms race right now in every regard, everywhere you turn, and certainly we've probably fallen behind there a little bit. So the indoor facility, the operations project being completed, those are all major gains for us, something we really need, and the stadium the same way. But there's a fan benefit from the stadium, and obviously the current players with the

facilities are going to enjoy that.

But I think for the health and well-being which ties into recruiting long-term of the program, if we're going to have a good program here in 20, 30 years, you have to keep pace and better yet get ahead of the game. It's even better.

Q. Where do you stand on the compensation of student-athletes, whether it's an additional stipend or paying them? Have you checked on autographs, for instance, checked to make sure that they are free? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: That's a phenomenon I'll never understand quite frankly, and it really impacted us in '02. It was just like a circus. We had people camping out. At that time we were eating at the old athletic club training table frequently, and we had out-of-towners camping out trying to get autographs, that type of thing.

I can only imagine what it's like at some places. NCAA rules are the NCAA rules. We more than thoroughly cover those, and when I say we, our student support staff does a great job of that, and as coaches we continually talk about current events and things like that.

And it's really complex, the topic about compensation. That's a complex topic, and right now I'm not too worried about it. I'm more worried about our season. All I know is whether the rules are just, unjust, need to be adjusted, as long as they're in writing it's just like anything, any law. If it's in writing you have to abide by it if you live in this country, and if you're a student-athlete or a coach you have to abide by NCAA rules. There's not a lot of discussion, and typically those discussions don't reach down to my level anyway, so no sense worrying too much about it.

Q. Have you been anticipating this season maybe more than some others to get that sour taste out of your mouth and get things going again? (Rick Brown, Des Moines Register)

COACH FERENTZ: I think any time -- it's like losing a game on Saturday. The next Saturday usually doesn't come soon enough. You could make that comparison certainly. I can't imagine anybody was happy about last year, fans, anybody that follows the team, certainly people involved with the team that put a lot of hours into it. Again, it's a simple adage: It's a lot more fun when things are going the way you want them to go. That's what happened, and the only thing you can do is

try to do something about it, so certainly that's where our focus has been.

Q. With the new staff and coaches, how has everything been going? (Josh Christensen, KCRG-TV)

COACH FERENTZ: It's been good, and again, I think anytime I talk about that topic, to me it's been a two-year -- this all got triggered when Norm retired a year ago December and then Ken went to Miami. It's rare, I think, certainly in this day and age to have a head coach and two coordinators and the head strength and conditioning coach go 13 years together. Maybe other people have done that, I don't know, but we had a really unique situation, something I'm really appreciative of. But change comes with anything, so we've had change, so it's been more of a -- to me a year-and-a-half transition, if you will.

Based on what I saw this spring I was really pleased, and nothing has changed since then, but going through spring practice it felt like things were really coming together. Everybody was working well together. It starts with your coaching staff. You can't expect the team to play like a good team if the staff is not on the same page, and I think certainly we've been together enough now that we're there.

Q. The program took some criticism for what happened at the end of last year. How do you deal with the criticism? (Luke Meredith, Associated Press)

COACH FERENTZ: That's part of the territory. It's the same way the praise that we get after a good year. It's just the way it is, and what's more important, I think, especially when you experience disappointing things, and if you do anything it's worth trying to do, that's significant and hard to do, you're going to have disappointing results. It comes with the territory. Maybe somebody is going through life undefeated, coaches, people, whatever, but you'd better be able to deal with it, and if you can't you probably should look into doing something else. I'm not really thinking about that right now. It's just part of the deal.

The one thing I have learned through the years, a lot of people offer up observations. It's better probably to focus on solutions, at least from my end. That's what I need to be worried about. I've got all kinds of people giving me observations.

We've just got to try to focus on what we can do to get better.

Q. What do you envision for Damon Bullock? (Ben Ross, *Daily Iowan*)

COACH FERENTZ: I read a quote that I had from I can't remember where it was from, one of the recent press gatherings, but just to clarify one point, when I said Bullock wouldn't block anybody, that was a year ago spring, like during spring ball of 2012. He did during the season. He really did a turnaround. But at the end of spring ball a year ago, it was not pretty.

What he did last year, really at this time last year we had no idea how he would play. We were hoping, but that's not a feel-good feeling sometimes. I thought he really did a good job when he was able to play last year and was very productive. I'm most pleased. Both he and Mark Weisman, I don't know if we had any guys work harder than those two in the spring, and they're much better football players than they were last November. It's a credit to both those guys. They've got great attitudes. They work hard. They're two different style backs and different style players, but Damon is a guy who was very lightly recruited that has really, I think, honed his skills. He's worked hard the way he's supposed to work, and it's fun to watch him develop into a good football player, and that's exciting.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Mike Meyer? He's seems to get better every year. (Rick Brown, *Des Moines Register*)

COACH FERENTZ: Nobody has really talked about it a lot, but I think certainly for us to be good on special teams, we have to have our specials doing a good job. We have to be good on special teams if we're going to have success this year, and Mike has done a great job. Each and every year he's improved, and I think he really gained his confidence, unlike Damon Bullock a year ago springtime. Mike was really hitting the gas pedal and doing a great job. But he's two years older, too.

He continues to do a nice job. We're really counting on him. Casey Kreiter has done an outstanding job. Certainly Connor Kornbrath, we expect him to be more experienced, and Jordan Cotton was a good story last year, so there's some good things going on with special teams. And for us to be successful Mike is going to have to continue to play well. We're confident that he will.

Q. With the return game, do you consider having Jordan Cotton back on kickoff and punt? (Brendan Stiles, *Hawkeyedrive.com*)

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think that's his deal necessarily. It's a little different, but it might be Kevonte Martin-Manley. He certainly can hit. Riley McCarron looked like he was a guy that could be a candidate. Canzeri surprised us. He had actually fielded punts pretty well in the spring, so we'll look hard at him and then kind of take it from there. But those are probably the top three guys at this point. Maybe B.J. Lowery, too; he's done some good things.

Q. You have a history of developing guys on special teams, especially on your coverage and block unit. Do you have that kind of depth do you think right now? (Andrew Logue, *Des Moines Register*)

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's better than it's been in recent years. Not to go into a long windy story here, but all three of our starting linebackers, Anthony Hitchens, James Morris and Christian Kirksey are fourth year seniors and you compare that to Chad Greenway and Abdul Hodge who chose to redshirt back in I think it was 2000 or 2001 - I'm losing my math here - but anyway, they chose to redshirt. We could have used them, but we had to use these guys on special teams. James ended up starting in 2010.

To that point, it seems like we can't get ahead in the count the last couple years with some of our guys, but I think right now based on what we saw this spring, our pool of special teams players looks a little deeper, the core guys that you have to have. Keep our fingers crossed there, so that might help us maybe hold a couple guys out of competition. But we're going to play whoever we have to play to be as good as we can on special teams. We're committed to that. That might be some of those young backs. They might be return guys, too. You never know. We'll see how it goes.

Q. Could you talk about the linebackers and how critical and important they're going to be this season? (Roland Glembine, *WHBF-TV*)

COACH FERENTZ: They're probably important in every defense no matter how you're built or what your style. Certainly here it's been important, and all three guys -- I've talked about the two backs really improving. I thought all three of them had the best spring they've had, which you

would hope. They're in their fourth years now. They were entering into their fourth years. They're great off the field, do a nice job in the classroom. They're tremendous team guys, great leaders. But most importantly they were really playing well in the spring.

James Morris and Anthony Hitchens should make a lot of tackles. That's how we're built. Christian Kirksey won't, but the unique thing about Christian, he could play any of the three. He could play middle or that weak side position, so he's got a tremendous flexibility there. But history has shown that's really an important position. LeVar played there, LeVar Woods, Grant Steen, right down the list. But that position won't get as many tackles, but really important if we're going to play good defense.

Q. Prefacing the depth at tight end and the versatility of some of the backs, does that allow Coach Davis to maybe open up the game plan and do some things that maybe he wasn't able to do a year ago? (Luke Meredith, Associated Press)

COACH FERENTZ: With that open up stuff, believe it or not we actually did have some guys running down the field. It has to be there, and things have to be clicking and meshing. It's a big part of coaching is figuring out what your personnel is. That changes sometimes week to week, you never know. But building it around what you have changes every year.

To that point I think Greg is a lot more comfortable with our players now. I think everybody is more comfortable with the terminology, all those types of things, and now what we have to do is design -- clearly we need to have enough big plays offensively, certainly we gave up too many on defense, so those are at the top of the list as far as us being successful. We have to do a better job there.

But a lot of times I think we dumped it off to Mark Weisman -- I think it was a 3rd and 17 down there in front of their bench, 3rd and 15, whatever it was, and he converted into a 1st down. Sometimes it's not a deep throw, it's a guy that can make -- it's not just the quarterback or the length of the throw, but it's what people do when they get the ball, too, that contributes to big plays. There's a lot of ways to make them, but we clearly didn't make enough of them.

Q. You've got former players in preseason play tonight, I believe. What are

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your thoughts on that? (Danny Davis, Mediapolis News)

COACH FERENTZ: I know Miami and Dallas played. Who's playing tomorrow? We've got about four guys up there, I think, right? Okay, a couple guys. Hopefully nobody bets on preseason football. You shouldn't bet anyway, okay.

All of our guys that are out there, you hear good reports. Unfortunately Bryan Bulaga getting injured the other day was really tough. He's had a rough road there, and that's disappointing. But the guys that are in camps are competing hard, I'm sure, and we're cheering for all those guys, needless to say.

Q. How has Barkley Hill progressed from his injury? (Jim Nelson, Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier)

COACH FERENTZ: Part of that was our situation. We were really thin last year, and looked like he was doing a really nice job. Unfortunately he got hurt that last scrimmage. Fluke thing, which a lot of times knees are, and so that was unfortunate. In the spring he was able to work but not go full speed all the time. He didn't quite have that comfort level back. That's a position certainly that a lot of cutting, planting, that type of thing, but he's full speed now and a guy we're really anxious and eager to evaluate. He's still a young player, but we're really eager to watch him and Mike Malloy, the two of those guys being first year backs.

Q. What's your overall feelings about the tight end position and how does it stack up after C.J. Fiedorowicz? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I think right now we probably have five guys we'd be comfortable putting in a football game, and I can't say that about any other position. Certainly you never have a five deep, and it's a little bit of a different position, but it's almost like a two and a half deep if you think about two of them on the field at once. We anticipated that. We saw that coming last year and felt pretty good about the way the group was developing. C.J. is a big, physical guy obviously, a 270-pound guy, and Ray Hamilton is probably more of that mold, whereas Jake Duzey and Henry Krieger Coble, they're more of receiver type guys if you will. And then somewhere in between there

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we've got a fifth guy, so that's kind of the deal there. I said Henry, I meant George Kittle. George is more the receiver. Getting my Kriegers -- so anyway, Henry has got a little bit of a different mold, different operation. One of the things I will say that I've been pleased with, one of the downsides of using Weisman as a fullback, he was a pretty good fullback, but really pleased with Adam Cox and Macon Plewa. They've done a nice job at fullback. We've only gone pads twice, but they look like they can really help us at that position. One good thing there, at least that's going to take pressure off us using Mark as a fullback. I don't know how much we'll have to do that. Not that we won't ever, but that's a good development, too.

Anyway, the five tight ends we mentioned, Henry, George, the other three guys I mentioned, we've got some things to do there.

Q. With Greg Davis in his second year now, is he a bit more comfortable running the no-huddle? (John Patchett, HawkeyeMic.com)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it was tough early, but the guys picked it up pretty well. We're back to not quite square one but not far away from it at this point in practice. It was kind of ragged today. But it'll come around. They'll pick it up faster than they did in the spring. Happy with that, and I think it benefits our defense, and again, we get to control it offensively. So we'll just have to figure out how much, how little, that type of thing.

Q. How good can C.J. Fiedorowicz be? (Don Doxie, Quad City Times)

COACH FERENTZ: That remains to be seen, and it's really up to him. That's the great thing in life, if you can control your future that's a pretty good deal. He's got some tools. He's different certainly than Dallas Clark, total opposite end than Dallas, and Tony Moeaki was somewhere in between. But we haven't had a guy his size -- I obviously think about Mike Flagg, and I doubt Mike Flagg was 270. I don't think he was, but back then it seemed like 270. Not everybody is as big as they are now.

So yeah, C.J. has got a good future ahead of him, and obviously the better he plays this year, that'll help him in the future, too. But yeah, it's all good. Really happy he's with us.

Q. How is Austin Blythe grasping the position at center? (Scott Dochterman, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

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COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, he really didn't have much problem in the spring, so that caused us to be pretty optimistic, and part of that, not that he played great last year, but he got to play and he had some injures. He really lost ground after he got hurt, but just being in a game, it does help a little bit that way, and I think that made his switchover a little bit easier. He had been snapping and working, so I think he should be very, very capable.

Q. Now that Nate Kaeding is back in town, has he been coming around the program at all? (Ben Ross, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: Actually I saw him a lot earlier, and then I haven't seen him recently. I got a picture of he, Dallas Clark and Casey Wiegmann on RAGBRAI. He's probably doing some stuff you can never do when you're busy. But he'll be around. He'll be around for sure. He's very invested in the program. He's invested in this whole community. Things like that make you feel good.

We've got a lot of our former players that have kind of come back to this area, and it's just nice that they want to come back here and be around and be seen a lot. That's a good thing.

Q. Nate and Mike Meyer, they have a pretty good relationship I understand. What's it like dealing with a former player that comes back and mentors? (Ben Ross, Daily Iowan)

COACH FERENTZ: That's the nice thing about having guys back, and I've encouraged all our specialists, not just Mike but even Connor Kornbrath. Punting and place kicking are very different, but the psychology of being a kicker, it's a different position, probably a little bit like being a relief pitcher. Those guys are over there somewhere and all of a sudden they've got to come in the game and join the other guys. So just the thought processes that they go through, all the situations they face, I think there's a lot of parallels.

Yeah, we've encouraged those guys to tap in, and Nate is great about that. But when Marshal Yanda comes in and trains weight room, which he does frequently, if he doesn't say a word, that's just a good thing for guys to see a guy. There's a reason he's all-pro and he was the same way when he was here. He's just a guy that works and exudes the right vibes, if you will. I don't pay him to come in, but I would if he asked me. No, I don't

want to give him any ideas. But that's stuff you can't pay for. That's really a good deal.

Q. You open up again this year with Northern Illinois, and last year I think you beat them by a point in Chicago. They have many of the same players coming back, but they have a new coach coming back. How do you perceive them preparing with a brand new coach? Do you look at the film from last year and think, okay, that's what they're going to do, but they've got a new coach so I'm not really sure? Does that make you feel uncomfortable they've got a new coach or does that make you think we've got an advantage over them? How do you feel? (Dan Stasi, *Mediapolis News*)

COACH FERENTZ: Usually it's bad to play somebody that has a new staff in your opener, but really we don't expect a lot of change. The defensive coaches are excellent and they had an excellent team. The coordinator is the same, and then obviously Coach Carey has been in that program, so we expect them to look very -- they've had such great success. I don't know why they would change. That's why they kept all the same people there. So at least from that standpoint there's not as many guessing game questions as you might have with a new staff. That's the good news.

The bad news is they're an excellent football team just like they were a year ago. We had a lot of respect for them last year, and the only big hole in their team last year apparently at this time was they graduated a quarterback. Seems like the guy that stepped in there did a pretty good job. I think he's up for the Heisman for good reason. They've got an excellent program. It'll be a great challenge.

Q. How high is Brett Van Sloten's ceiling this year? (Darin Svenson, *DKEC Decorah*)

COACH FERENTZ: We talked about the guys we took to Chicago, James Morris and Christian Kirksey, but Brett is just an unbelievable guy. He's a tremendous leader, hard worker, just everything about him, he exemplifies what you're looking for and what you want in a football player, just a guy that goes to college. He's just a tremendous young man. And very respected by our football team.

So the fact that he's played, he's been there, he's not afraid to voice his opinions at times,

and he's somebody that we all appreciate a great deal, outstanding leader.

Q. What's it been like to have basically everybody healthy right now at running back? (Josh Christensen, *KCRG-TV*)

COACH FERENTZ: We've been able to get some quality work done and productive work, and we're still not settled totally with the line. But I think you can go a lot of different ways. Some things are looking pretty firm, and we have good healthy competition. It's not like we're just trying to fill a hole right now. Guys are really competing. So that helps, and as I mentioned, the two backs are doing better, and Jordan Canzeri back for the whole spring, as you guys saw in that last scrimmage, he's really grown and done some things.

At least we're further ahead than they were last year, and that's going to help our pass game a lot, too. This stuff all ties together, so it's really encouraging. But that being said, we still have work to do, and we're eager to watch and see how the guys progress.

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