

August 26, 2014



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

KIRK FERENTZ: The players' leadership group selects the weekly captains and on the defensive side we've got Louis Trinca-Pasat; Quinton Alston will be representing the defense; offensively Brandon Scherff and Mark Weisman. They'll start out as our captains, good selections there certainly.

To bring you up to date on injuries, Darian Cooper did undergo knee surgery yesterday. He's had some knee issues for the past year, and he was able to play in the bowl game despite some of those issues and just hasn't been able to push forward. That was addressed yesterday.

We don't expect him to play this year. He's a tremendous young guy, and it's hard any time anybody loses time for an injury, and Darian joins Adam Cox on that front. Certainly we feel bad about that.

Riley McCarron is also out right now. He'll be out for a couple weeks with a shoulder injury that he experienced in the open scrimmage. It will probably be somewhere around the bye week before we get him back. We'll take that a week at a time and see where it goes from there.

That being said, we're certainly ready to get started, like probably everybody in America right now, and we're excited to be back in Kinnick. Starting out there is always a great thing, and we've got a very big challenge on our stands with an outstanding UNI football team. They've got a great tradition with their program. They've played very well. If you look back the last five openers they've played extremely well, and we expect a very tough, competitive ballgame Saturday. They've got an outstanding football team with some outstanding performers, very veteran on the offensive side and pose a lot of threats to you that

way. Then defensively they're always tough. They make you really work hard, and they're very aggressive and good on special teams.

We're going to have to be at our best certainly. I think our team has improved over the past couple weeks like you're supposed to. We need to have a good week this week certainly to get ready for a very tough ballgame on Saturday.

Q. I wonder if you could talk about your kicker and punter.

KIRK FERENTZ: Right now, if we were playing tomorrow, which we're not, but if we were playing tomorrow, Dillon Kidd would start out as our punter and Marshall Koehn would start out as the placekicker.

The good news is it wasn't so good a year ago, or at least in the spring it wasn't good the way we finished up, but I think all four of our guys have really competed. The two punters, Connor and Dillon, have done a nice job, and really it's a very close competition. The same thing with Marshall and Mick, and Miguel is just a little bit behind them, but I think despite the open scrimmage where we didn't placekick very well, we've gained ground there. We're eager to see those guys compete in game situations.

But it's been a positive.

Q. How do you think you might utilize the linebackers?

KIRK FERENTZ: I'm not sure what we'll do right now, but it's probably fair to say they'll all play. The guys that are splitting time, and we've got a group of guys right now. We'll see how it plays out, but we're still probably not sure. I think it's probably going to take some game experience to find out who really rises.

But I think the competition has been good. The guys have really been attentive. They've worked hard and competed hard, and there again, we're eager to see what they do on the game field

and how it plays out.

Q. Damond Powell looked like he might not be able to play until conference season and he's on the two deep. Did he heal up faster than expected?

KIRK FERENTZ: He did. He's ahead of the charts and I don't know if those charts were based on people my age or a young athlete who's actually in good shape, but Damond is a pretty resilient guy, and he's really come back quickly from it. His attitude has been great all the way through. I don't think he had contact until the end of the last week, but he's looked good out there in practice and he's got some catching up to do, but at least he'll be with us and helping us out.

Q. Have you made any decisions on true freshmen playing and how many?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's fair to say we'll play Miles Taylor, we'll push him ahead. Ben Niemann certainly is going to be pushed ahead, and we're toying around with Aaron Mends over on the offensive side. We actually have fooled around with him at fullback with Adam being out just so we don't get knocked out of fullback packages. So he's done a good job there. And then Mick Ellis is a good possibility, too. Hopefully we don't get there, but he's a possibility.

Q. How dangerous of a game can this be against a team like UNI?

KIRK FERENTZ: You go back to the last five openers, one against us, it took a miracle, not good fortune, but basically a miracle for us to win. They opened up at Wisconsin in 2012 and I think it was about a five-point game. Wisconsin had an excellent football team. Last year they opened up with Western Illinois and they looked razor sharp in their opener. One thing if you just go back in recent history, these guys are going to be ready to go, there's no question about that. They really don't care where they travel. It's not unlike a North Dakota State a year ago doing the same thing, going on the road, and it doesn't seem to bother them who they're playing or where they're playing. They play good football, and that's something UNI has done traditionally very well.

I think last year if you look at their record, there's more to the story there. That's not a typical UNI season, and you think about the running back being hurt, you think about the quarterback missing a couple games there at the end, and

even then, they were very tough, competitive ballgames.

When these guys are healthy and ready to go, they're going to be a challenging opponent, and we'd better be at our best, I know that.

Q. What do you think defines that program?

KIRK FERENTZ: Consistency is probably the first thing that comes to mind for me at least, being here 25 years now. I can't go back to the early '80s but in recent history, at least the last 10 years or so, they've been extremely consistent. They seem to compete for that league title every year, and if they're not in the winner's circle they're right there knocking on the door.

And then again, early season they don't seem to mind where they go or who they play, they go and play well. So if we're surprised by that, which we were in '09 for whatever reason, we'd better change our attitude on that one.

Q. Any concern about the cohesiveness of the defense?

KIRK FERENTZ: Sure. I mean, any time you have new players I'm concerned about the cohesiveness of our entire football team. Any time you have new players enter the mix, you've got work to do. You get X amount done in practice, that's like every team, but until you really start playing games, that's really when you find out about the personality of your team and how things are going to materialize, how guys are going to react. We have a lot of guys that have never played outside of the kids' day scrimmage. They haven't played in front of anybody of note in college.

Every situation is really important, and all you can do is try to prepare, and I think our guys are doing that. Now we have to do it this week, but we've got 12 games. It's going to be an adventure and a journey. Hopefully not too adventurous, but a journey for sure.

Q. You look at the last two times you've played Northern Iowa, how can you describe the running game against Northern Iowa and the past experiences with the RB position?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's a world of difference from 2012, and that was Mark's coming-out party actually. I think we had two guys get knocked out during the game, one knocked out

literally and then another elbow problem, so Mark kind of got thrust on the scene. Two years ago we weren't sure if we had a Big Ten running back. We found out we did. Damon Bullock did a good job when he was available, and Mark really, I think, did a great job. But yeah, we're a little further down the road.

So that part is good, but we have other parts of our team now, losing the linebacker. Certainly other parts that have to be addressed, and we really have to make sure we're gaining ground there.

Q. Were both of those running backs in the running to play?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think for us to have a good defensive football team, our defensive line is going to have to be productive and do their jobs well, and they should. We're more experienced there, basically at every position. I'm not taking anything for granted, but if we're going to have a good defensive football team, it's going to start up there. We're going to have to really play hard and aggressive. The four guys that finished the year last year last did a nice job. Nate Meier I think is one of our most improved guys on our football team, so that's encouraging, and some other guys are gaining ground, but hey, we're going to need those guys to play well, and we're going to have to play well on the back end, too, the guys that have played. Jordan hasn't played a lot of football at free safety, so that's going to be a little bit of a learning experience, but I feel like he's a veteran player who's not exactly like Quinton Alston but similar to that. I think both those guys are primed to play well, and if we're going to have a good team, we're going to need them playing well.

Q. Are all four of those running backs in the picture to play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I think so, definitely. We weren't sure but we talked a little bit about possibly red-shirting LeShun Daniels. I mentioned Nate Meier. I think LeShun is probably the offensive version, he and Henry Krieger Coble, are guys that really elevated from a year ago offensively. Yeah, he's right in the mix right now. The big thing we have to do right now is just try to use him intelligently.

Q. Talk about your linebackers with UNI's backfield?

KIRK FERENTZ: I don't know if one guy will do it, but as Norm used to say, you stop great

players by playing great team defense, and I think that's really the key. David Johnson an outstanding player, it doesn't matter how you slice it, dice it, and that's run, pass or block. He'll do all the things you would ask a back to do, a really good back to do. He does them very well. And we're going to have to really play good team defense because if you let him get going, it's not going to be fun.

Q. The starters you're settled with. Is it reassuring knowing the guys you're going to put on the field for the most part?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, it's probably similar to last year where I think we have a fair amount of returning guys that have played well, but the key, and you know, you go back to last year, our linebackers really played well. I think the key thing to remember about them is they played a lot better last year than they did the year before, and they were experienced that year, too, in 2012. Experience is important, but only if you use it to your advantage. I think about those three guys, the way they practiced in the spring, the way they trained in the off-season, the leadership they gave us, all the things they did, it's hard to replace that, and Brett Van Sloten is probably the same story. Brett kind of flies under the radar being an offensive tackle but he gave our team a lot. Those are the things we have to replace, and to do that you need your guys like the guys, the four captains I mentioned minus Quinton, but the other three guys, they have to play better than they did last year. They've practiced better, and I don't mean that in a derogatory sense, but they understand that. They know what you're supposed to do. So it all starts to me with the guys coming back have to play better or else we're not going to have the kind of team we want to have. It starts with them, and then we've got to work through the growing pains with the guys that haven't played a lot.

Q. You have had some success stories with kids that came to you under the radar and maybe could have ended up at Northern Iowa. What's it like recruiting against an in-state school where they have to take a chance on you?

KIRK FERENTZ: You know, it's a fine line, and we're probably more like them than we are some of the other teams that are out there. I mean, there are certain players my sister could tell



visit our archives at asapsports.com

you are pretty good prospects, and that's pretty easy, but it's the guys that aren't, and two names that come to mind real quickly, Bryce Paul and Brad Meester, he had a pretty good career. He just finished up. And there have been others, obviously Kurt Warner. I still want to know who the guy ahead of Kurt Warner was his fourth year. That's how those stories happen. There are a lot of good football players out there at all levels, and it's a really fine line. People don't realize how fine a line it is.

Q. You used a guard (inaudible) and then a group went outside (inaudible)?

KIRK FERENTZ: Oh, we'll see. We'll see. I think he's capable of playing out there, but he might be better suited to be a guard, but Yanda was kind of that circumstance, but we needed him at tackle. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. I hope we don't need him out there this year. Next year but hopefully not this year.

Q. You said in Chicago that in 2012 you basically didn't have a passing game --

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah.

Q. Can you compare and contrast where it ended in 2012 and where you began this year? There's a lot of optimism this year.

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're better positioned right now. We went through a huge transition, I can say that now, but it's a huge transition. We changed our system nomenclature right on through. That was a challenge, and there was no easy way to get around that I don't think.

And then, yeah, we just weren't very experienced at some of the key positions, so I think outside of quarterback, and I still think it was a tough hand for James to be dealt, but that's the way it goes sometimes. We're in a little better position right now, but the world can change fast, so it's just a matter of us right now, we've got to keep our foot on the gas. I'll go back to the point I made earlier, a guy like Tevaun Smith got better last year, but if he doesn't keep getting better, we can take that passing game and throw it in the garbage can. We just need everybody to do their part. We lost a really great player with Fiedorowicz, a guy who was a really great player for us in the red zone, so we've got a lot of other guys that have to grab the rope here and do a good job. I think we have the opportunity, the potential to be better offensively, and that would

sure help, especially some of the guys we lost defensively just help balance things out a little bit.

Q. Do you feel that there's a higher level of competition to get on the field at that position?

KIRK FERENTZ: I do, I think especially at the receiver position. I think we have more guys competing, and certainly having Riley in there would help. That was a loss for us because he was doing a lot of things really well, particularly the week that he got injured.

But I think overall, yeah, it's more competitive right now.

Q. With game week, is there a heightened sense of excitement either around campus, and what are the changes you've noticed?

KIRK FERENTZ: I've been out on campus. I noticed there's more people here. I did get out yesterday to do the Chamber of Commerce deal at noon, and yeah, the world changes a lot the last week and a half probably when people start trickling in town. I'll be out there tomorrow night, I think, and tomorrow I'll be out at noon to do a few things. But for our players most importantly, just to end camp, we finished that Friday afternoon, and I thought we started to turn the corner a little bit at the end of last week starting to look a little bit like a team. Hopefully this week we will have good week of practice because we need to get sharp here and get ready.

Q. What's it like around when you see people? Can you kind of tell they're excited?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think it's been that way all summer, just the places I've been. Yeah, it's been good. I think everybody has been good, and everybody is usually nice to me anyway in public. Then when I turn and walk away it's a different story, but that's okay.

Q. What have you seen in Bo Bower and Josey Jewell as far as they're second-year guys but obviously competing for a spot, and what about Reggie Spearman? He had a year on the field, but he's younger but the same class.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, they're all kind of the same, they're all kind of different. All three of them obviously we liked in recruiting and really

thought they had good potential, then it's a matter of how quickly they're going to come along. In Reggie's case he was the furthest ahead last August, so we made the decision thinking ahead that kind of like the A.J. Edds story that we thought he'd be in the mix, and if he could help us on special teams, play on 3rd down, that might be a way to get his feet wet and help move him along further. Josey emerged more so in the spring. He did a good job on the scout team and Bo did the same, but in the spring they really started to emerge and it started looking like they could maybe fit in somewhere, somehow, some way.

Part of that is what they were doing, the other part of that is the graduation. Usually those two things play into where a guy fits in on the depth chart.

Q. Off topic, student ticket sales, in a general sence, does it bother you that ticket sales are dropping.

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, yeah, in a perfect world I wish -- you'd hope every student would want to come, but it's not a perfect world, and that's what makes our country great. But I'd hope they'd come support the team and all of our sports. It's a good part of campus life, and hopefully that'll pick itself up.

Q. There's been a bit of a heightened awareness over just the numbers, analytics and kind of predicting things before they happen with football. Do you buy into them as far as what teams might do in certain scenarios?

KIRK FERENTZ: That doesn't work so well.

Q. I didn't think you did.

KIRK FERENTZ: Which analytics? What department are we talking about?

Q. Not so much what happened on the field, not too much physically but on the field.

KIRK FERENTZ: Like help me out, lead me along here a little bit.

Q. 3rd and 1 what teams do, what works, what doesn't work. I'm guessing you don't buy into that.

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, we study as much and try to have as much information as possible, but at the same time it's just -- week to week things are -- it depends where you're at and

how things are going and all those types of things, but yeah, information is good to a degree for sure.

Q. What's the dialogue with Jake Rudock now compared to a year ago in the sense that you didn't know what you had, and C.J., both of them? What's the dialogue and communication like?

KIRK FERENTZ: It's probably more two-way than one-way in that like those guys can both give us good information now. Gosh, we just showed a clip the other day, it's not the same thing, but there was a play we ran in one of our later games where the guys -- basically it was a communication that happened during the course of the game, coaches to players, players to coaches, and when it goes both ways, that's a good thing.

So the point is I think when players are more experienced, they're more capable of telling you here's what I feel good about and why, so I think that's certainly a good thing, and that's something that you try to build with every player at every position, but it takes time.

Jake has got a real good feel for what's going on. He sees things well, and he did last year for a first year player. What he told Greg Davis coming off the sideline was usually matched up with the film, and that's a good sign. That's one of the reasons we felt good about him last year.

Q. Greg Mabin is kind of a good story.

KIRK FERENTZ: It is, yeah.

Q. What have you seen there, and how has he been able to progress this quickly?

KIRK FERENTZ: I can't give you the exact date, but kind of like Mike Daniels or some of these guys, I think he was a late evaluation guy for us, and I can't remember where he was looking, doesn't really matter, but it was more so in January, I think that we had an interest in him, and we weren't sure if he was a safety, receiver, corner, we weren't sure what he was. But he seemed like a good high school player that we thought was being under-recruited. His high school coach was actually a guy who coached a couple years of college football, and he really felt highly of him, too, when we were down there visiting. His cousin I believe it was played up at Northwestern. Anyway, it felt right, but the rest of the story is last year at this time he was a scout team player who really hadn't done much to

distinguish himself in a real positive way, but to his credit, he's worked hard, and then this spring he really started to rise and get noticed through his hard work and his play out there on the field. Again, we had an opportunity, door was open, so he's really done a good job.

We'll see how he does this week, but I think he's really prepared well and hopefully he'll play well this year and beyond.

Q. Do you foresee using multiple corners, one guy?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think so. Yeah, that competition is pretty close, too, kind of like the kicking and punting. Reese has done a good job there, Sean Draper has done a good job, and I think it's wide open right now.

Q. How much of a size advantage do you have over UNI?

KIRK FERENTZ: Not as much as -- I haven't done the numbers, but I'm guessing they've got a bigger line than we do. Most people do, although Scherff might be tilting the deal a little bit. But these guys are big. They've got big guys up front, and more importantly they're very well coached, and the thing I'll go back to is just a year ago if you look at their opening ballgame, which I did in week two of last year or three or whatever it is, I was just so impressed with the execution, the level of execution that they just played in their first game. You take the guys up front that block like these guys do and then throw a very talented, experienced quarterback, another quarterback that's very dangerous and a running back who's good and good receivers, I mean, we've got a heck of a challenge on our hands defensively right now.

Q. What's going to be an ideal number of carries for your running backs and will all four play?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, we haven't really talked about it in that detail, but we feel good about all four. We'll just kind of play it by ear. Again, the big thing is if we can -- as opposed to some of the games in the past, hopefully we'll have Mark Weisman healthy in the fourth quarter, not healthy but fresh where he can really be going strong.

And I mentioned a couple other guys; Damon Bullock has really had a good August, which is really pleasing. You talk about seniors raising their level of performance, he's done a good job. So we'll see how it goes, but we're

comfortable with all four guys. They've really done a nice job back there.

Q. Besides the obvious things like health and injuries, what separates a big season, a championship contending season from say just a good season?

KIRK FERENTZ: There's a lot of things, but injuries and luck are two of the things, how you handle the ups and downs. Hopefully we'll have some ups. It's not guaranteed, but I know we'll have some downs. That's part of life and part of football. So how we handle those things, whatever challenges pop up, which despite everybody's wanting to, nobody can predict what's going to happen here the next four months.

Just how you handle those things, it's a day-to-day deal. I think that's a big part of it, and a little bit of luck never hurts and some good stories emerging, developing. Hopefully the Greg Mabin story continues, and we just have some good things happen.

But that's what you play the season for, and going back to that point earlier about the experts and all that, I mean, I just got done on that teleconference, three out of the top five teams at least in one of the polls I looked at were unranked going into the season last year and ended up in the top five. That to me is the fun of college football. You just never know what's going to happen. There are a couple that I could probably take a wild guess and guess they're going to end up in the top five, but there will be some surprises, too. Those teams obviously did a good job with it, and those are the challenges, just how you handle them as they come along.

Q. Did CJ Beathard do enough in camp to -- you talked about maybe getting him time in game. Did he earn that?

KIRK FERENTZ: I think we're still thinking about that. I don't know when, where or how, but yeah, we're still considering it, and yeah, we feel good about him.

Q. You awarded a couple of walk-on scholarships this week with Bo Bower and Boone Myers. What's that like for you, and do you talk to the parents, too, and what's their reaction?

KIRK FERENTZ: Pretty much tell them, the first thing I tell them is they're not in trouble

because they're up in my office and they think they got called to the principal's office, and that part is good, and it's a short conversation but it's a pretty happy one usually. That's one thing we tell guys on the front end in recruiting is they're going to be treated fairly and they're going to get opportunity. No matter how they get here, it doesn't matter, but if they're in the program we're going to judge them like we do everybody else and then try to reward them as fairly as we can. We've actually given out four this camp which is really a nice thing, and it's four guys that have really worked hard and earned them.

Q. Who are they?

KIRK FERENTZ: Our two fullbacks, they got it right off the bat.

Q. Do you feel as good about your running game right now as you have in a while, the total package?

KIRK FERENTZ: You never feel too good about anything, especially right now. But yeah, the guys have practiced well. They've practiced well. We've still got to block, they've got to run the ball and hang on to it. Certainly compared to two years ago we're in a lot better shape there. But we've got to go out and play now, and that's the big challenge that's ahead.

Q. The hype surrounding Carl Davis. Is that something you've predicted?

KIRK FERENTZ: When he came in?

Q. Yeah.

KIRK FERENTZ: I mean, yes and no. He's had the potential. Both he and Scherff when they got here didn't look like your average bear. We just haven't had many guys walk in like that. But they were young guys at that time, so you never know how their careers are going to unfold. It's a credit to both of them because both of them have fought through injuries that have slowed their progress down, both have kept great attitudes and they both have worked extremely hard.

They both are capable of playing really good football, and if we're going to have a good football team, we're going to need them to. I know that's their expectation level, and it's certainly ours, too. But they're both great people, and they're good team members.

Carl is just a really positive -- he's a good young man, so we're really happy he's on our football team.

Q. If something was to happen, is Tyler Wiegiers the third quarterback?

KIRK FERENTZ: Let's not even talk about that, okay? Geez.

Q. Would you pull off the red shirt of Tyler and have him come in, or do you have a plan in case of emergency?

KIRK FERENTZ: Yeah, Dallas Clark, who's a high school -- I'm trying to think of who the high school quarterbacks are. We haven't had that discussion. We probably need to do it by Saturday. Scherff, there you go. You might see me heading to the locker room if this happens. No, in all seriousness, Tyler Wiegiers is our third guy, and that's the way it goes. We'd sure like to red shirt him. That's our goal. But we're playing to win, and he is clearly our third guy.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports