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An Interview With:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Obviously it was a tough loss for our football team this past Saturday. And what we need to do is move on right now.

One thing I didn't do on Saturday, but I'll do it right now, just compliment our crowd. They were just fantastic on Saturday. I mean, the stadium is good. It's been good, you know, for a long, long time, but it was a great crowd so we really appreciate that.

We move on now. We are playing Michigan State. They are a very talented team, a very well-coached team. And I think the thing that stands out as much as anything is they are very, very balanced, whether you look at them, how they operate offensively, they can run and throw, defensively they play both well. And special teams, they are good in all areas.

They are a very balanced football team. They are playing very well right now. And you know that's what happens when you have a good team that's well-coached and they have just done a good job. It's going to be a great challenge for our team and we are certainly thrilled to be back in Kinnick, and have a lot of work to do between now and then but we are looking forward to Saturday.

Q. Do you see similarities between Michigan State and your team a year ago? Michigan State came in a little under the radar and have not lost yet and had the close game in Notre Dame.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, in the sense that we were undefeated at this point and they are undefeated this year, and playing well, maybe under the radar, but maybe that's been paying attention. We knew they had the potential to have a good football team and things have really come

together for them. That's what we are seeing right now.

Q. Given some of the mistakes and Michigan State's propensity for trick plays on special teams, how much do you do more in that area this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and they do a good job offensively, trick plays, gimmick plays, whatever you want to call them. It's not like they just hold them for special teams. They threw the wildcat pass against Michigan. I think Kansas City had run against, whoever they played, same play, Cassel threw one down there. But we saw that on the Michigan tape.

So they are playing to win. They are not just throwing stuff out there. It's well-conceived and they do a good job executing it. All of those kind of plays, whether it's offense, defending their offense or special teams, you have to be sound in your responsibility, so it's something we have to be very, very aware of.

Q. Stanzi and Cousins, are they similar --

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. You know, Cousins did a great job last year playing for them and he's playing really at a high level right now and Ricky is doing the same for us.

So you have -- somebody mentioned earlier, the conference seems to be really loaded with great quarterbacks this year and different styles of quarterbacks, but these two guys are very similar and they are both playing at a really high level right now.

Q. You mentioned the balance that Michigan State has on offense, is this as good of an offense as you've seen this season?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. I just got off the phone with a writer from Michigan State -- East Lansing, I should say. And he mentioned they had

a hard time running the ball the last two weeks; that's his opinion I guess.

I just know we played Michigan the week after Michigan State had played and looked to me like all three of those backs -- I asked him if any of those guys could be on loan. We are not allowed to trade or swap in college. They have three backs that could start for people.

But part of the running game's effectiveness is the fact they can throw the football. They make you defend everything. They have got the ability to run the football. They have got three excellent backs, and you know, they throw it around pretty well, too. And they have got good skill players and good tight ends. So it's just a tough team to defend. You know, you can't load up on one area.

Q. The last couple of weeks, the points given up, how do you evaluate the performance of your defense the last two weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: We gave up 30 last week or 31, and whatever we gave up the week before. We'll evaluate at the end of the year I guess. I'm kind of bigger on doing that when the season is over.

Every game you have areas where you don't do well enough, and you have others that are pretty good and you try to make some corrections and move on. We are not looking to go to a 3-4 or 4-2 or anything like that. We are going to stay with our scheme and try to play better.

Q. Will linebacker health this week dictate what you're able to do defensively a little bit?

COACH FERENTZ: It's going to dictate who plays and we are better with Tarpinian at least, going into the season and he may get back on a limited basis but we can't count on that. We'll play the guys we have and we'll play better.

Q. Is Jeremiha okay?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how the week goes. He got nicked up a little bit.

Q. This is the week pinpointing where maybe Norm could comeback --

COACH FERENTZ: He won't be in the office this week. He may be at the game, which is great. But to say he's back with us working, that's not a sure assessment, yet. I thought talking to some of the people working with him, I thought he

might have a shot, like today or tomorrow, I don't think that's going to happen.

Maybe the end of the week, maybe next week where he can be, you know, able to come in the office a little bit. It won't be this week but maybe next week that's a possibility. We'll just keep pushing ahead.

Q. He might be at the game?

COACH FERENTZ: He might be at the game. But it's not like he's really wired in; hasn't been at practice, that type of thing.

Q. Could you tangibly state what his absence has meant?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't. It's like not having a player in your lineup. It's hard to measure that. But I will say, I think everybody has done a great job in his absence. And you know, we have got to start by tackling better and playing blocks better. That would help this Saturday.

But as I said Saturday, we went against a team that's going to move the ball on everybody. I would be surprised if anybody shuts them down totally. We are facing a team similar, not exactly the same, but we are facing a team that's every bit as talented offensively this week. So it's going to be another challenge for us. We just have to play better football.

Q. Throughout your tenure, you'll have great streaks -- the other way, when you are going through close games, is there anything --

COACH FERENTZ: Can you be specific, going 1-8? First year we did, I know we did.

Q. Right now a stretch of losing four in a row in that situation, but you also have been on the good end of that. So do you see -- is there a tangible or is anything you can measure?

COACH FERENTZ: Comes down to details and making plays. It's pretty simple. I'll go back, our first 20 games we were working at it but weren't really there. 2006, I said this publicly, we were in shutdown mode. We were not a good team the last six games, which is more puzzling because we were 5-1 going into that stretch, and we had a six-game moratorium for whatever reason. And that's my responsibility.

So you know, that's the deal. And you go back, if you want to talk about Michigan State, we

turned it over, I believe, four times two years ago, '08, lost by three points. That's kind of the story about that game.

Any time you lose a close game and go back and say this, this, and this, the challenge is to win more than you lose in those situations, whether it be turnovers, third down conversions, those kind of things, things that won all those games for you. The better you do are that, the more apt you are to be successful. We didn't do that Saturday.

Q. Based upon the review of the small things that maybe you didn't --

COACH FERENTZ: One thing that was interesting Saturday, we didn't turn it over yet. But there were other things that balance that out. But that's winning and losing, basically, if you're competitive.

Now the years we haven't been competitive, you know, it doesn't matter. And in '06, we just didn't play with an attitude that deserved winning. So, you know, if you don't do that -- that's the main goal out there, and we did that a couple times. So that's coaching there.

Q. Based upon the things you saw in film, the small things maybe you didn't do this week, do you feel the majority of those are correctible?

COACH FERENTZ: I feel like we can win any game on our schedule. I feel like we can lose any of them. That's kind of how I felt in September and things haven't changed a lot.

We have had have some injuries. But so has everybody else. That's part of football. And the teams that played through the situations, the best are the ones that come out on top. The teams that don't, you know, don't. So that's how it works.

Q. Do you have any moves left on special teams? You've thrown everybody out there?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, never done it totally, but see what happens. Not to be dramatic, but we are going to try to tinker and try to position guys as best we can at least in our estimation and hopefully we can develop consistency and I think that's what we are looking right now is consistency --

Q. Will we see Adrian on kick coverage?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably not.

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Q. How many of those mistakes do you attribute to inexperience versus out of position in the scheme?

COACH FERENTZ: Saturday we had both. We had some inexperienced mistakes and we had some veteran guys that made some critical errors, too. That's the part where I like to minimize those because you know you're not counting on that going in.

Hey, I blew some things, too. Wasn't counting on that. And all of those things add up. We have to do a better job. And inexperience, you have to live with. Not singling out Don Shumpert, but he was off-sides on that kickoff, it's his second game ever. Only thing I'm upset there is on the next play, he was very tentative because as you might imagine, he was afraid of being too aggressive. But that's a second-game performance. He'll be better this week. He's still going to be out there, I can assure you of that; he's a good football player.

Q. Claybourne was visually upset after the game. Kind of broke down a little bit, said that changes need to be made as far as the week goes in preparation maybe; is that along the leadership line or is somebody taking a leadership role?

COACH FERENTZ: He's done a good job and Stanzi has done a good job but my concerns with them going into the season, you know, they are totally invested and they have been for quite some time. They were both strong leaders last year. I worry about both those guys wanting to do too much or feeling like if we lose, it's their fault, one of those types of deals. That's a good thing to try to coach out of. You'd rather have a player feel that way than the other. What every player needs to do is do their job as well as they can and do it with great effort. That's why Adrian is a good player and Ricky Stanzi is a good player, as well. You can't do too much. I know he was upset. We all were. It's tough to lose. It's not much fun.

Q. You mentioned that you blew some things on Saturday, as you evaluate yourself, is there anything you can change?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot of things, but you don't get that opportunity. So you live with it and hopefully you learn from it.

Q. That last series, the third time out, kind of evaluate what happened, what did happen?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, in retrospect, I wish we had clocked it quite frankly. And we had an 11-second play in there, which is interesting, the one where Reisner ran out of bounds, that took 11 second, part of our thought and for whatever, the sneak took one second, I'm not so sure that happened. We thought the clock was going to be down under ten when -- after the sneak. That was our thinking.

Retrospect, I wish we had clocked it. I think we ended up with 12 on the clock after the sneak. I'm not sure how that happened. But anyway, that was part of the thinking. Retrospect, I wish I had done it over, could do over. I can't. So, live with it. Cost us one play.

Q. Was Ricky going back in the shotgun at that point or was he trying to get under the center? Because it had been the shotgun if you clocked it, that's grounding, right?

COACH FERENTZ: We would clock it from the center, he would do that, yeah. Well, but he would have gotten under if we told him to clock it and if we had given him a signal.

Q. The game against Michigan State, really physical, I remember things like the Sandeman hit, Richardson breaking his leg. Is there just something about the way Michigan State plays that it seems to lend itself towards physical hits and games like that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they are a tough, aggressive team, so that's just part of the deal. Unfortunately, we had a couple players injured. Dace said he saw somebody fell on him. That was a big hit. Somebody fell on him from behind. But to your point is was really a hard-hitting football team. That's just how both teams are built and this week will be much of the same.

Q. Easy to say now, on the fake punt --

COACH FERENTZ: Let's go right down the list.

Q. Was a punt safe ever anything that was discussed?

COACH FERENTZ: It was a thought, and in retrospect I wish we had done it.

Q. A lot of people did not seem to occur to anybody that that was a possibility.

COACH FERENTZ: That was a possibility. We thought about it. We have two people rushing the punter. We have two other people assigned to watch, to make sure the ball is punted before they leave their responsibility, and that didn't happen. That's kind of like the Super Bowl, the line turning and running before the ball gets kicked on the kickoff. That's how you sneak an onside kick in there. It's pretty much a similar situation. Had we gone punt safe it, would not have been an issue. Put it down, we blew that one, that's my job.

Q. Do you think the offensive line, can be graded as good as they have all year in one sack --

COACH FERENTZ: They played well. I'm not big on grades, but they played well. They are improving.

Q. Marcus will have a little bit of a reunion this week, and you've seen siblings play against each other?

COACH FERENTZ: They are on special teams, might see each other, that might be about it. I don't think it's a big story. I'm sure it is to them.

Q. Do you need Mike to play better? He's had a couple balls go over his head the past couple of weeks.

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not big on grading players in the public quite frankly. We need everybody to play better. I probably need to coach better, too. He probably thinks that about me, right? But I think we all can do better. That's all I'm doing to say.

Q. Can you take me through the recruiting of Cousins? Were you looking at him much at the time?

COACH FERENTZ: We looked at a lot of players. We looked at -- who is a running back we didn't -- -James White, right.

It's the same story. You recruit players and go with the guys you think are best. Sometimes they are good players and sometimes they aren't. Stanzi has worked out. Vandenberg has worked out. I think we have two good quarterbacks and they certainly have good

quarterbacks. Can't get them all.

Q. How have your safeties played, Sash and Greenwood.

COACH FERENTZ: They played okay. I don't want to turn this into a grading session. We're talking about corner safeties. Anybody else you want to throw in there?

Q. Every one of your tight ends that started for you has gotten drafted. Do you think Reisner is moving up that ladder?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think he is. And their tight ends are good, too. They have got some pretty good ones and we think Allen has done a nice job. He has played better with each year, and played well last year and he's having a good season.

He's playing well. Safeties are playing well to answer your question. There are some guys playing well. We are not a bad team. We still have some hope. If we can overcome the coaching we'll be okay. We'll get there.

Q. What do you think Dantonio has done to take that program up?

COACH FERENTZ: I think said this awhile back, years ago. To me, they did a good job at Cincinnati. I think a lot of the success you've seen at Cincinnati was rooted with that program. That's just my observation. I'm not an expert on that program; I shouldn't say expert, but I'm not fully knowledgeable. Not discrediting anybody else, but I think they built a good foundation at Cincinnati.

I thought it was an excellent hire when they hired Mark first back in 1989. He was at Youngstown State as an assistant, and you know, followed his career from afar. He's done a tremendous job everywhere he's been. And I think when he went to Michigan State, I think they basically, that whole staff went intact, great cohesiveness, continuity. They had a staff in place, unlike when I came here, we had guys coming from all different directions. We had to create our own playbooks and all those type of things, but they had all that in place.

I think what you've seen is a staff that's cohesive, they are very knowledgeable, they are very good. And just take that philosophy at East Lansing, and they have recruited well, they coach well. And what's happened is, to me a predictable outcome.

He's done a tremendous job and he's done a great job this year. And the staff has done a

great job, too. You talk about us losing Norm; they lost a head coach, which in our case would probably be an advantage if it went that way, if Norm stayed and they got me out of here.

I was so impressed during the bye week, I can't remember who they played-- it was Michigan, right? That was one of the few games I've watched this year. But, boy, they just operated really well. And he's up in the press box. It was his first game back I believe.

When you have a staff like that, I think that when they do things like that, that speaks well of the entire staff and just the stability of the program. They have built it with a good foundation underneath them. That's going to make them tough, not only this year, but in the years to come.

Q. Historically your program has been able to move past big wins, losses, and move forward. Do you talk much about the big picture for games like this, what it could mean?

COACH FERENTZ: No. To me it's still too early to talk about the big picture. It was last week; two weeks ago, when everybody is dying to. But really, it's October.

What's important right now is we play well this week. That's really what's important. If you're going to have a good team, a successful team, you have to get over disappointment. That's just part of the deal.

We were there last year. We have been there every year. We have not gone through a season undefeated. And unless you can do that, then that's part of the terrain that you have to deal with, and if you can't deal with it, you're not going to be successful. So that's a challenge ahead of us, and we'll regroup here today and do our best this week.

Q. What does it take to go unbeaten in college football?

COACH FERENTZ: First, you've got to be good. You're never going to be totally injury-free or bad call-free, or not bad call, but unexpected things that happen. But when those things do happen, you have to be able to deal with them. Just there's challenges in every year.

But it starts with being good. You have to have good players and you have to have a good coaching staff and you have to handle the weekly challenges and they are always out there. Everybody has got them. But it's really hard.

History's dictated -- in the old days, I think it was lazy, when certain teams just had talent stockpiled to the rafters.

But I think the parity that we are seeing in college football, and certainly in our conference right now, I think it's really fair to say just about anybody can beat anybody. I don't know who we would play that would be capable of beating us in our league, and conversely, I feel like we have got a chance every time we take the field. So it's a little bit like the NFL in that regard.

Q. Is this a product of five years of learning for Derrell, now he seems to be more of a target for you guys, more of a go-to.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, if you look at our receivers, talk about stockpiling talent, our receivers are mostly converted players. Derrell and Marvin are both starters and high school quarterbacks. It's common sense, you get better as you go if you're paying attention. Derrell made some plays three years ago and all that, but he's a much better football player than he was, you know, two years ago, or even last year in my mind.

So he's worked hard at it. And he's had a good attitude. He's a good team guy. And he's really playing well and we are thrilled he's on the team. You guys think I'm joking. But I'm serious. He's done a great job.

Q. How is he better?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's a little more proficient now in what he's doing out there.

Q. In the details?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, and there's details at every position. There's a lot to learn at every position, and things change on the fly, you know, so the experience players are usually a little bit better reacting to things.

Q. You joked before about how -- inaudible -- could have been arrested for child abuse, throwing as a true freshman but I noticed on some of the plays, especially Robinson's 30-yard run, he seems to be bulked up compared to where he was a few years ago and his blocking just seems to have been--

COACH FERENTZ: I don't remember exactly what it was in '07, but he was in the teens, 218, 217, something like that.

The alarming part, again you look at his helmet, he looked like he was 14, speaking of teens. He really looked young in the face. And that

doesn't mean anything, but it added emphasis to where he was at.

Most of the guys that we have played as freshman, we have chosen to play them. In his case, it was just desperation. We were out of guys. And to his credit, I thought he really competed and did a lot of good things that year.

So clearly, the next year was '08, he was a solid guy then but the last two years he's really played -- he was a starter for us last year in my mind. When Tony was out, he continued -- he just played great. Tony came back and that gave us two guys. Right now, he's really playing well. And we are counting on that. I'm not surprised by it at all.

Q. Outside of the touchdown pass to Marvin in last year's game, what moment sticks out in that drive last year, that final drive? Is there a play or moment that you thought, that was a key get over-the-hump thing?

COACH FERENTZ: Stross, he caught a ball across and did a good job, too. He did it a couple of times last year. But, if you're going to execute a drive like that, things have to happen. Some guys have to make some plays. But everybody kept their composure, and did a good job moving it down. Points were tough to come by for both teams in that game. That was a hard-fought game, great defensive game.

Q. Is it maybe a little harder for Ricky because of all of the great comebacks he had last year, Saturday, took it more upon himself and was not able to bring the team back?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope he didn't. Like what I said about Adrian, I just worry about both those guys. On the one hand they are the face of our team right now, because they are the most experienced, notable guys. But we are just asking them to do their jobs. It's not their job to win the game for us. By doing their jobs, they are doing their part, and I think for the most part, he's done a great job.

I'm sure he felt that way, and that's how he's built, that's how he's wired, just like how Adrian is. That's what makes those guys good players and good leaders. But they are back with us and back on the ground here. We'll turn our sights to the next one.

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