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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: To start out real quick, on the injury front, it looks like we're going to be without Tony Moeaki for a couple weeks here certainly, and then unfortunately Andy Brodell, the news isn't quite as good. I think we're going to lose him for the season. We'll go into this game without those two guys and kind of move forward from there.

Captain-wise this week we've got Albert Young and Damian Sims again on the offense and Mike Klinkenborg and Bryan Mattison defensively.

And then just a couple words again about last weekend. It was a tough ballgame, I think both teams fought really hard, it was a great environment, and just a tough night. We had a long ride home certainly, got back Sunday morning, and just a tough day like any loss. It's always tough on Sundays, but we'll go back to work today and get our focus turned towards Indiana.

First of all, it's good to be home. We've been on the road a little bit the last month, so it's good to come back home, good to be back for homecoming. I know we'll have a great crowd.

We've got a great challenge on our hands playing Indiana, a team that played us extremely well last year, and they're playing better now than they were a year ago. They're a team that's playing extremely hard, they're well-coached. Defensively, a lot of guys are back -- in fact, on both sides of the ball, you've got a lot of guys back playing well defensively. They're well-coached, tough, hard nosed there.

And offensively, they pose a lot of problems. They have a very good corps of receivers, very fast running back in Thigpen, and the quarterback is playing extremely well. He was a young guy, we played him last year, played really well against us, particularly as the game went on, and he's doing a great job right now running their offense.

It's going to be a heck of a challenge for our football team; one, getting off the mat; and then secondly, having to prepare for a very, very good football team. So that's the work that's ahead of us and we'll get back at it today.

Q. Is there a more specific time frame for Tony than a few weeks?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think, you know, a couple weeks is optimistic. Could be -- it just depends. The most significant thing is his elbow, how that responds. It could be two weeks, could be a month, we'll just see how it goes. We'll know more here in two weeks.

Q. What are the specific injuries to Brodell and Moeaki?

COACH FERENTZ: Unfortunately, Tony had two injuries on the same play, dislocated his elbow which is the most serious part, and then he broke a bone in his hand to add insult to injury. And with Andy's situation, he just had a very, very severe hamstring. That's not a good thing. So that's kind of where we're at.

Q. He pulled or tore a hamstring?

COACH FERENTZ: He tore it, so it's not good.

Q. Is Andy eligible for a medical red shirt at this point?

COACH FERENTZ: Not to my knowledge. He would be if he hadn't used one, so -- he already took a red shirt year, so unless he would have another injury -- I think you usually have to have two years of significant injury, so I don't think that's the case.

Q. How about Vanderveide?

COACH FERENTZ: Julian has a chance. We'll know more tomorrow probably, today or tomorrow. I'm not optimistic there. Stross should be back practicing, so if he can make it through the week. He hasn't worked much in the last couple weeks. Signor, we'll let him do some individual stuff today and then see how he does tomorrow. He's got a chance, but I don't know. I think that's pretty much it.

Q. (Question regarding Austin Signor)

COACH FERENTZ: It just depends how practice goes.

That's one of the good things, if there are any good things that come out of injuries. It gives other guys opportunities. We had a bunch of guys step up the other night and do some good things, I mentioned that after the game, and Murray was one of them. He had a good week at practice and good pregame sessions. I think he felt confident going out there and he looked extremely focused. And I thought Austin was coming on in that Iowa State game, so hopefully something good will come out of it so maybe we'll get two guys who have gone through some of the youth jitters, if you will.

Q. (Question regarding Klinkenborg and Moylan concussions)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we expect those guys to bounce back. We had a couple concussions during the course of the game. I think all but one guy right now is past the first hurdle to get back.

Q. What's the procedure on concussion injuries?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know the details. It's a day or two where they rest. They have to pass a couple different tests, one being a bike test, and if they can get through the bike test then they're allowed to start training again without contact. All but one has done that now. But hopefully we'll get them all back.

Q. You had said before that maybe it's a little bit easier (indiscernible). Does that give you a little more hope that the transition at wide receiver won't be so --

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're home free. It's a piece of cake out there, so -- no, it is a little bit easier, I think, I do believe that. It doesn't mean it's easy. It's all relative. But yeah, it's a little bit easier. And those guys have all been practicing hard and practicing well. We've got enough to win with, we just have to try to put something together here.

Q. What were the areas you saw some improvement in development in?

COACH FERENTZ: I think, first of all, we competed real hard, which was good. Not that we haven't, but we had the tempo you need to have to be successful, which was good to see. The defense obviously did a lot of good things, really

played well and competed hard. I thought our offensive guys are -- I think they've been competing hard, it's just a matter of us gelling and putting things together, but there's some things that are affecting us right now and we're going to have to work through those areas and get there.

I thought Jake kept his composure and played well in tough circumstances. I thought he grew from the week prior. I think he's been growing each and every week, so that's certainly a positive.

The guys up front are doing some things better. We're not there yet, but they're doing some things better. So I think overall as a team we grew.

And on special teams, too, we did some things better. I think our tempo has been pretty good, but we're not cohesive enough yet. Obviously our field goal protection has to improve, that's inexcusable. Yeah, we're doing some things better, too. So we're gaining ground, we're making some progress.

Q. You said after the game that it looked like Jake belonged there.

COACH FERENTZ: It was good to see the other guys jump in and do a good job. Certainly in the receiver position a lot of guys are getting an opportunity. It was Chaney's first experience playing in a ballgame, Koulianos, the same thing, he got more playing time than he's ever got, and Sandeman got to play again. He's been playing a little bit, that's good. Jacody Coleman coming in when Klink got dinged and doing a good job. He looked like he belonged out there.

Those guys are into it, they're doing some good things. There's some things on special teams we're seeing where some new guys have come up, some obvious things like Jayme Murphy certainly and Dana Brown, that was his first exposure on a kickoff team and did a good job. Both he and Jayme got there on that one. We're getting some efforts, and we've just got to keep pushing forward.

Q. How did Dace Richardson look to you?

COACH FERENTZ: He looked better than I would have anticipated. I told somebody based on what I saw last weekend, if you had told me he was going to play as many snaps as he did, I would have been a little skeptical. And the good news is he came out of it feeling pretty good. I think that's a positive.

But he looks a little rusty, just like in

Syracuse, he looked rusty in that ballgame, too. At least he's got an experience base that he can build on. That's the good news there. So it'll come around. And the more work he gets, the better he'll be. His attitude his good. He was smiling yesterday, so he felt better yesterday than he did a week ago, so that's a plus.

Q. Do you think about the No. 2, No. 3 tight end much?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I've thought about it. What do they call that, fantasy football? I don't understand fantasy football to be honest with you. It seems like it's permeating our whole existence.

But yeah, we're thinking about it and moving a couple things around. We're not sure where we're at right now, but we'll just keep fooling around.

Q. Is A.J. Edds a possibility?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I guess he's a possibility, but he's really starting to get the hang of it on defense right now, and I don't think we want to tinker with something that's working pretty well. I'd be lying if I said I didn't think about it, but that's about as far as that one went, I think.

Q. What about Tom Busch? I know a lot of times there are three wide receivers that signal backs. Do you see him getting a chance to do that?

COACH FERENTZ: He'll stay in the backfield.

Q. Your wide receivers, did they meet your expectations?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, the catch that Derrell made was just outstanding. Whether you're a senior or a freshman, that was just a great play, and against a good defender. And his kickoff returns have been impressive, as well. He's a guy that -- the thing about him, I think all of us felt like he was a pretty good football player coming in, but a little bit like Andy Brodell, he was not a receiver in high school so he's really been trying to learn that position. Fortunately, I think he's getting a feel for that, and we think he's got tremendous upside.

That's the good thing about all the young guys. I said that about our team, I felt this three-four weeks ago, that we had a chance to improve greatly as we go along, and we're going to have to. I mean, we have no choice but to do that. That's the challenge that's ahead of us, but those guys will help us out and they'll do some good things for us.

Q. Seems like most of the close games the last couple years have been going the other way. Does that wear on the team after a while?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think it wears on you, but it's certainly something we are aware of. There are a lot of statistics I don't put much stock into, but certainly that's one I do follow. I think it's seven of them now in a row or something like that. You go back to little things, usually it's traceable. And when we were winning those close games, which we did a pretty good job of, we weren't getting PATs or field goals blocked, that type of thing.

When you're involved in close games, everything is magnified a little bit, so you've got to be more detailed. You're never quite sure what play is going to affect the game. That's one thing about being a player or coach, you never know what is going to affect it. It's like our ballgame two weeks ago; there are certain things you could focus on, but I could give you 15 that really affected the game dramatically. Yeah, when it gets down to the last minute, you're focused on that, but there's usually 10 or 15 things that you can go back to in close games. And that's the challenge for the football team is to get over the hump on those.

Q. Do you feel like winning one of those could turn the tide?

COACH FERENTZ: It'll help, certainly it'll help. That's for sure. We've been involved in some tough games. It'll come around. We just have to keep improving.

Q. With the relative inexperience at wide receiver, have you given any thought or toyed with the idea of putting Damian and Albert on the field at the same time?

COACH FERENTZ: We've done that in the past. Certainly it's something that makes sense in our equation, just because they're experienced players, not only experienced but they're good players. They're productive, they're proven productive, and it's something -- we'll have to look at that a little bit harder now.

Q. You talked a little bit about A.J., about the interception and the forced fumble on the goal line. He seemed to come into his own in that game?

COACH FERENTZ: I thought he for the most part looked more comfortable Saturday than he has at any one time, and that comes from

experience, too. He's playing a good position. For the most part he's getting where he has to get, getting to the right places. The interception was a fantastic play, that's a good play, really a great effort on his part. But it starts with being in the right spot and having a feel for what he's doing out there. So I think that part is coming. And then after that your skills take over a little bit, too.

Q. You and Indiana are both in the top of the national rankings on turnover margin. How much role do you see that playing next week?

COACH FERENTZ: That's one thing I should have mentioned when Bob asked that question about positives. That's something coming into the year that we were very focused on. It ties in with losing close games, too.

You know, probably the one stat that really concerned us the most last year is the turnover margin. For the most part we're doing pretty well at that right now. Ironically, I guess we turned it over in the game we won handily. But it's going to be important. It's important for both teams certainly, and I'm sure they're thinking the same way we're thinking on that one.

Q. Indiana has a spread offense, which you've struggled with in the past. Do you change your defensive approach?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll find out this week because these guys spread it out and they've got good receivers. Again, it's a mixture of guys. They've got speed, they've got big, physical guys, they've got big, physical guys that are fast, Hardy. You know, they're a tough match-up, and then the quarterback is doing a heck of a job.

For us it's playing good team defense. Like anything, no matter what offense you play, you have to -- I think you rely on all 11 guys to do their job, and if somebody can do something on top of it, it's great. But certainly you've got to be in good position. You've got to trust that your teammates are in the position they need to be in, and hopefully you're doing it with good technique so you have a chance to be productive. But it's a challenge.

Q. Have you guys changed at all in the last couple years, from last year to this year?

COACH FERENTZ: A lot of it is dependent on your personnel, what you feel like your players can do. I go back to the first year we played Northwestern, you know, in 2000 after they rang up 50-plus against Michigan the week before, and we opted to play our regular defense the next

week. And I think Norm made a great call on that. At least we knew what we were doing in all instances, that type of thing, and it worked out pretty well. It's all predicated on what you can do and get practiced, first of all, what your players can handle and what you can get executed during the course of the week. We'll try to come up with a couple things.

Q. Indiana gave up almost 300 yards on the ground to Illinois last week. Do you hope that you guys can put together a better rushing performance this week?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, A, we hope we can do better than we did last week. But B, we don't look anything like Illinois. It's a totally -- talk about spread offenses, a lot of those yards came off option plays and things like that, so I'm not so sure how much good that tape does us. In fact, I'm pretty sure it doesn't do us much good. We don't look like them at all. It'll be a tough, hard-nosed game that way.

Q. How do you guys begin to defend James Hardy, a guy with his size and speed?

COACH FERENTZ: You're probably asking the wrong guy on that one, because we're 0 for 2 right now. He's a tough match-up. They do a good job putting him in good position. But he's a good player, he's a guy with good size, speed, he fights for the football, and we seem to bring the best out of him. He's played two very excellent games against us. The guy is a tough receiver.

Q. What is the status of Trey Stross?

COACH FERENTZ: He will practice today and we're optimistic that we'll get him back. He hasn't gone through the week yet, but he pushed pretty hard last week with the trainers, and now it's a question of can he go out there and play.

Q. How much more of a factor does special teams become when you consider the fact that Indiana has (indiscernible)?

COACH FERENTZ: That's something they're excellent at, both punt return and kickoff return. So it's one more thing you have to worry about, really. It's another way for them to change field position or even generate points, so we're going to have to be really good. And given our circumstances right now, I think it's always been that way, but we need to be playing well on special teams. We need to take advantage of every opportunity. Our first two challenges will be coverage, kickoff or punt. That's going to be a

challenge for us.

Q. Can you reflect on Terry Hoepfner, and when you heard the news were you shocked?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it wasn't shocked. I think we all sensed that Coach Hoepfner was going through some tough times. He was not at the spring meetings, so Bill Lynch, Coach Lynch was there and just updated all of us that it was significant, which we all knew that. So I can't say it was shock necessarily, but obviously I think everybody that knows Coach Hoepfner was sad about the news.

Probably the most amazing thing was the way they've handled it and the way he handled his past year. I mean, he wasn't looking for anybody to feel sorry for him. He had a very positive attitude, and I think it's funny, his family grabbed onto that, they followed his lead. I've heard accounts about just the way they handled it all the way through the whole process, and it's pretty remarkable.

The guy did an excellent job coaching at Miami. We got exposure to him back, whatever that was, 2002, 2001, I guess, and gotten to know him off the field a little bit, excellent person, more importantly, than a good football coach, a very good person. Outside looking in, he was a perfect fit at Indiana. But the most resounding thing, just a great person, great person and good for football, good for the people he worked with.

Q. Do you see Arvell Nelson doing the Jason Manson thing?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a possibility. Anybody that -- it's funny you mention that because he's on our Wisconsin tape from a year ago, looking at that. But anybody can chip in right now, we're -- auditions are open right now.

Q. (Indiscernible) or do you have him kind of split?

COACH FERENTZ: It's kind of tough to do both, so he'll probably favor the offensive side, the receivers, I mean.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

COACH FERENTZ: You can't worry about that or think about that, and I don't know how to put a measurement on it. You know, it's part of the game, and you keep playing.

The good news is we've got some guys that can still play and play well. We may have a little bit of an inexperience moment here and there, one of those types of things. But yeah, we'll play.

We'll get the guys ready and then we'll play. We don't have any excuses. We're looking forward to getting out there and playing Saturday. We're not ready to play yet, but we need to be by Saturday and we will. Nobody is worried. We're not worrying about that stuff.

Q. I'm sure you've taken exception to some of the things that have been written or said about your football team. Did you see the incident about Mike Gundy at OSU?

COACH FERENTZ: I've heard a little bit about it, but I didn't see it.

Q. How do you handle it when you take exception to something that's written or said?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, if something is unfair, I may communicate that with the individual if I feel it's unfair, not that I'm Judge Wapner here or any of that stuff.

But my only request would be that things don't get personal with the players. I'd prefer they didn't get personal with anybody else, either. But as adults, criticism, let it come, but just don't get personal with the players and don't cross any lines that way. I have no idea what was written, I have no idea what was said by either party, so I'm just -- but our case, you know, I've said this, we opened the door for some scrutiny and what have you. I was told there was a graphic on TV the other night. That's really unfortunate, I think, that there was a graphic on there.

A couple of the things right now that we're dealing with are accusations, and they're no more than that at this point, serious accusations and we'll treat them as such, and we have. I think we've been pretty consistent with our discipline, and most the things our guys have done are pretty typical of college-aged students who are athletes. It's unfortunate.

The ironic part right now is this is one of the best groups of young people I've ever been around. We've got that out there. But the bottom line is this is about as exceptional a group as I've been around. Now, we haven't run the whole race yet, but I've been around these guys a little bit now, and we've got a great group of young people.

It's just unfortunate, but I think we've invited some of it, so I can't sit up here and complain. I won't. I won't complain.

Q. Generally speaking is there a line, is there a difference in the way that criticism is leveled against pro athletes versus --

COACH FERENTZ: I think it's totally

different. If somebody is getting paid and you're in the public arena, you're fair game. I've got no problem with that. People can rip on me. It comes with the territory. It already has at times, and it will more. I understand that. That's part of the job and that doesn't bother me in the least.

You know, what I worry about is what my peers think. That's what I worry about and always have. People I really care about -- not that I don't care about outsiders' opinions, but a lot of times I don't. That's an honest answer. A lot of times I could care less. What I care about are the people that I respect, somebody that knows what they're talking about and has a problem. Yeah, I care about that.

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