

July 28, 2011



An interview with:

IOWA HEAD COACH KIRK FERENTZ

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz. We'll have an opening statement and then take questions.

COACH FERENTZ: Thank you.

First of all, welcome to everybody. Certainly I think, like everybody else, we're very eager to get back on the field with our players and get started with our preparation for this season.

Like most teams right now, we have some good veteran players back. Brought three guys to Chicago with us that have done a great job. Mike Daniels, Tyler Nielsen, Marvin McNutt. We have other seniors we're counting on for good leadership and production on the field, Shaun Prater, Brad Herman, Markus Zusevics, and also Broderick Binns, guys have that played very well for us.

Like most teams, too, certainly we have a lot of young guys that we're eager to see how they come along. I think that's going to be the key for our football team, how we come along from this point. I think we have an opportunity right now to really grow. Eager to see how things develop.

I kind of go back to 2008. We had a team very much in transition during the months of August and even September. I think of guys like Pat Angerer, Ricky Stanzi, both second-team players at that time that earned starting jobs by the end of September and went on and had great careers. We're eager to see what the next six or eight weeks brings, see how things develop and eager to get started with our play certainly.

Last two things. Obviously just want to welcome Nebraska to the conference. That

certainly is big news with what's happened over the past year. The addition of Nebraska to the league, a great addition. Along with that divisional play I think it's going to add a new level of excitement and interest for the fans.

The last point, want to pay tribute, we have a gentleman, Phil Haddy, that served the University of Iowa, last season working with the football program. Phil has actually been at all 40 of these events. That's quite a feat. I doubt that many people in this room have been there in that time capacity. Want to thank Phil for his service to the university over the years.

With that, I'll throw it out to questions.

Q. Will you speak about how your program specifically benefits from the addition of Nebraska.

COACH FERENTZ: First and foremost, I think it's a fantastic thing for the conference. I was in the league for nine years back in the '80s, gone for nine, now I've been back again. I was not here when Penn State joined the league. I think we'd agree that's been a tremendous thing overall. I think this is a move that balances that out, if you will. I was not here during that time of expansion, but what a tremendous program they have. What a tremendous university and tremendous people associated with the program. I think for the conference it's a great thing.

In our case we have a border that we share. It's certainly I think something that is going to be something very much of interest for the fans. I remember coming to Iowa in 1981, there were probably more Nebraska fans than Iowa fans. Hopefully that's changed a little bit, but time will tell. I think it's a great thing for people in our state.

Q. As competitive as college football is, as cyclical sometimes things are, nonetheless you built consistency into the program that even when things got uneven, it was surprising. What do you think was behind that? You certainly destroyed some of your opponents that were quality, yet had difficulties

along the way. What do you see different this year, particularly with a new quarterback?

COACH FERENTZ: Really in a nutshell for us, last year came down to how we handled close games. We dropped three games in November, total of 10 points. If you look at all of our losses over the season, about four points a game. If you contrast that to the year before, we ended up in the Orange Bowl. That was a year we did very well in close games.

I think it's probably true for a lot of us in the conference. We play in a competitive league. This year will be no different. The better you can handle those close ballgames, the more successful you are in those, the better your season will be.

A lot of things go into that certainly. But to me that in a nutshell is what it's all about. I think college football is a lot like the NFL, at least the competitive conferences, which are many of them. The teams that do better in the close games are going to be the ones playing at the end of the year.

Q. (James) Vandenberg struggled in his first appearance against Northwestern, came back and had a great effort. What do you think you saw from him that can make him a great starting quarterback in the Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: It was ironic at that time. We had a pretty good record. I think he had thrown two passes when he got called into the game. He went in there and learned on the job, on the fly. Wasn't pretty. Certainly the next week he competed at a high level and gave us a chance to win. We dropped the game in overtime. He certainly competed at a real high level.

The next week we played an opponent that threw a lot at us. Again, that slowed him down a little bit. But I think I'm most excited about, we've had a chance to watch him over the past year getting ready and preparing as if he were going to be the starter. I think he really took advantage of his opportunities last year. He's really grown.

Sometimes good players get stuck behind good players. I think that's really what we have with James. We had a great confidence level in him last year. Obviously Ricky Stanzi was our quarterback. He has a nice window of opportunity and he's worked hard to prepare for this moment.

Q. Kirk, in past weeks John Swofford and Mike Slive have talked about sweeping changes in college football, specifically raising the GPA from a 2.0 to a 2.5. Your thoughts on that?

COACH FERENTZ: I have to apologize, I'm a little behind in my current events the last three weeks. Tried to get away from things. Those are ideas that have been thrown out. I've heard about those. I think there have been a lot of ideas promoted over the last six months probably specifically.

I'd support both those notions. I think those are good things certainly. But it's going to be involved and it's a process. A lot of the requirements were put in place years ago, it takes a while for everybody to catch up.

The important thing is for young people to understand at a young age when they're in high school doing well, doing well early, instead of trying to catch up the last couple years. It's going to take a cooperative effort from a lot of different folks.

I know our commissioner threw out in our meetings last spring the idea of the fifth-year, making first-year players ineligible, giving players a five-year window. Taking that first year and letting them get acclimated on campus, taking pressures away of having to produce as heralded recruited players. I think those would be healthy for football. I don't know if there's practical. I don't know if we can work those out. That might be a great thing that would slow the recruiting industry down too.

At the end of the day it would be great for the prospects and student-athletes.

Q. You've now had two straight years of very close games to Ohio State. Are your players looking ahead to that game at all, hoping to improve on that as well?

COACH FERENTZ: We'd love to have that opportunity. We were in the championship game. They're not on our schedule in the next couple years. If we had the opportunity to face them again, that would be a very positive development. Hopefully we'll do a little bit better next time.

Q. Running back Marcus Coker exploded on the scene. What are your expectations for him?

COACH FERENTZ: We just want him to continue to improve like every player on our roster. If I could cite one thing that impressed me more than anything about Marcus last year, he fractured his collarbone third or fourth practice starting out in the fall. For a true freshman to miss as much time as he missed, when he did return in the middle of

the season, be on task like he was mentally, that really was a good key.

I remember Bryan Bulaga his freshman year getting injured, missed four weeks, was a smarter player when he came back. That's impressive for any player, but certainly a first-year player. Marcus showed us that last year. Obviously played well on the field, too. We're expecting him to continue to develop, be a little more well-rounded. I think that's something he took to heart last week and did a good job of during spring practice.

Q. You mentioned how looking back to last year a lot of the losses, all of the losses were in one-score games. Several of your wins were actually by much wider margins. One of the things going into this next year is trying to figure out how to win those real close games. What do you think you need to do to turn that around?

COACH FERENTZ: The easy thing to do is always focus on the last two or four minutes of a game. Sometimes that's where you need to focus. I can think of a lot of examples through the years where really it gets started in the first half. You squander opportunities in the first half that might not be there in the second half. So it's really kind of complicated. A lot of things that go into winning and losing.

That's probably the message we try to send to all our players, you're never sure what play or series is going to have a big impact on the game. End of the day, that's why you need to be at your best at all times and be ready to compete at your best.

Q. You lost three defensive linemen to the NFL Draft. How do you recover from losing that talent up front?

COACH FERENTZ: It's unusual. We had three guys last year that were drafted. I expect all three of them to have nice careers in the National Football League at one position. It's obviously three out of four guys, pretty significant.

The good news is we have two players coming back. Mike Daniels and Broderick Binns are both tremendous young guys. Bigger picture is we had three last year, those two guys this year. In a two-year span we're going to take a pretty big hit at that position.

We have good leadership. Last year we played four or five guys during the course of the game. This year it's probably realistic we'll be

playing six, seven, maybe eight guys in a game. Might be a little bit more by committee than it was in year past, the last two years.

We'll find a way. I think the guys have worked hard. We have some guys eager to get their opportunity and get out there on the field.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

COACH FERENTZ: Thank you.

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