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An interview with:

COACH FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Obviously we're pleased and enthused about what we expect to be 19 players signed, right now it's 18. We're just really excited about the whole group.

So if you know anything about recruiting, it's a lengthy process, obviously, and it's really gratifying as you go through it. Just learning more about the prospects and as the process goes along. Having a chance to get out and be sitting in living rooms or kitchens and going to visiting the schools. I thought the thing you learned a lot about what the prospect's backgrounds are and learn about their attitudes, work ethic, and their character and support network. So that part is enjoyable. That being said, it's nice to be home too. I think all of our coaches feel that way. We're excited about being back around our players. All in all, things went well today. We're very happy about the prospects that have signed with us and committed to us. I know it's a very exciting day for all of them as well, their coaches, their families, and their support networks.

So it's just been a really special day. The thing I remind people, it's interesting with recruiting. It's become a big industry, a lot of interest which is devoted to it. But it's really hard to earn a scholarship for a high school and an athlete to earn a scholarship at any level. It's really a significant accomplishment. It's a real opportunity. It's an opportunity for them to open a new chapter of their lives, earn a degree at a higher level institution, certainly, and play football at a higher level too. So as we get past this -- that will be the next thing that we'll be looking forward to is how that new chapter unfolds for each and every one of the guys. Thankful for everybody that's involved in the process.

From our end, our coaches put a lot of time and effort into this. Our support staff is outstanding, our players, an unbelievable amount of time that they put in. Recruiting has become a year-round thing. We have prospects pretty much coming through just about every calendar month, and any time they come to campus, our players give up their own personal time to come over and spend time and share the message a little bit about our program, with the prospects. I'm appreciative of that. Along with that, anytime a prospect comes on campus, typically someone in our academic community is involved as well. They donate an awful lot of their free time to be with our prospects and tell them more about the academic programs here. So I'm just very appreciative of that.

Q. You expect one more to come in?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we have one prospect who is snowed in at a retreat right now. So hopefully no dog sleds intercept him and convince him to go somewhere else, but I think hopefully tomorrow that will be our 19th signing.

Q. Five kids from Iowa, four of them from here in Eastern Iowa, how big is that for you guys to bring kids from Iowa? And a lot of these guys were on winning teams in their high schools?

COACH FERENTZ: For 15 years, and I'm sure it's longer than that in our program, our recruiting of in-state players is so critical to us. We didn't get everybody we wanted from inside. But football in this state is outstanding. A lot of tremendous young people, and we're really excited about all the standings in our state. I think they have great upside, and great futures here. Historically they've done a great job. I think helping the other players from out-of-state transition into the program and maybe better appreciate some of the traditions here that are so strong.

Q. Was the 2012 season a big obstacle for you guys?

COACH FERENTZ: Maybe at the front end. Recruiting goes in different stages. Certainly last year at this time and throughout the spring it was something that I'm sure everybody is concerned about. Unless you live in a cave you can't help but be aware of what's going on, good or bad. Maybe at that point, I think once the prospects started coming to campus and they got around our players and you've heard me talk about the great job our seniors did that it trickled down throughout the whole football team, that began a year ago, a year plus ago. I think when prospects came to campus and got a chance to interface with our players, there were no guarantees, but I think they could sense that we were going to get back up on our feet and have a positive season. I think we were able to overcome that once the process got going. It may have kept some people away from us. That's entirely possible, but I don't think it was a big deterrent once they got going.

Q. How long until you really get a feel for your class and if it's going to pan out? A year or two, a year or so, what is it?

COACH FERENTZ: Just in general, I don't think you can judge a lot of big picture things with less than a five-year snap shot. That doesn't work in recruiting obviously or prospects. But to me, certainly, you know a lot more after six months and they've been on campus and gone through a semester. You know more after a year, and after two years you really get a good picture about how a guy is going to go and how you can predict things maybe.

That being said, that is one of the neat things about coaching. We've had so many stories of players that have blossomed in their fourth years, fifth years at times. That is one of the neat things about it. That is probably a little more inherent to our program. But even for those guys that are late bloomers, it really gets down to the work ethic and the stick-to-it-tiveness that they're able to demonstrate. Typically they have to learn some of that, but after a few years you typically get a good feeling about how they're doing.

Q. Along those lines, in the 2008-09 class you got hit with attrition pretty hard. And that showed up in 2012 because your depth wasn't like it normally is. So the last few classes, the attrition has dropped. You had

pretty much everyone back, so do you feel it's back on track?

COACH FERENTZ: You're hitting it right on the head. That is the biggest thing. It's a little bit of a crap shoot. You're projecting a lot in recruiting, but that's the biggest thing. We're trying to find out is this guy going to have the kind of pride and work ethic and perseverance it takes to earn a degree at a Big Ten university and also play in a program that's going to demand a lot of hard effort and work and that type of thing? So the better you can predict those things and then you never know about distractions that pop up in young people's lives and how are they going to handle those things. But attrition is our number one enemy. They can't get their degree here and be successful players if they don't stay with the program. So that is the biggest thing we're trying to gauge, obviously, outside of the obvious minimal athletic requirements, requisites and types of things. To me it's all about can the guy run the whole race, run it well, and run it hard.

Q. Last year you had a defensive back come out quicker than maybe you thought. You've got five defensive backs in this class now. Anybody you can see that could be on an accelerated curve?

COACH FERENTZ: It's hard to predict. I don't know if I could have predicted Desmond last year. That was not by blueprint. It was just one of those things that happened. It's great that it did, and I think that is the neat thing about recruiting sometimes. Desmond was not a heralded recruit when he came here. But he certainly showed that he's got the poise and mental toughness to go out there and compete at a really tough position. So that's a neat thing about it. We start out every season in terms of what we're trying to do in terms of fulfilling needs.

But this year we signed more DBs than we would have anticipated or set out to do. And recruiting is a fluid thing. So if you have good players that are still interested in you and you like them, sometimes you'll bend and expand what you thought were your needs and over sign in an area and make up for that later on. But all the DBs that we signed, we're really excited about, and obviously we're excited about Desmond and some of the other young players in our program.

Q. Was there a concerted effort to go after defense?

COACH FERENTZ: Defense more than offense. The DB thing keeps growing. Like I said, how many scholarships did we budget for your position again and he just kept recruiting guys. But the guys that we were involved with who we're really excited about and think they're good players, one thing I was intrigued about with most of them is they have two-way flexibility, if you will. We're planning on playing those guys on defense, but just to see guys with ball skills, I think immediately of Micah Hyde who was not a high recruited guy, but that's one thing about Micah, he had great ball skills. He could have been our best receiver his senior year, but I think it all worked out well for him.

Miles was the last to join the class in that group, and we just really liked Miles all the way. And as the process went on he became a little bit warmer to what we had to say and it just kind of worked out that way.

Q. You've had bigger classes than this otherwise. You've got a kicker and a punter. Is that more about them or what you have right now?

COACH FERENTZ: It's an area that we think we need healthy competition this spring and this summer. So we feel like we have a chance to have a good football team this next year. I know we've lost some really good players in that area, so we want to add to the competition.

Q. You lose three linebackers, was that another emphasis?

COACH FERENTZ: It was. Having three seniors is good news and bad news there. The other factor there at that position, we've lost a couple of players over the last year too medical red-shirts. So kind of behind-the-scenes that number was growing, besides the obvious three guys that we had that are seniors and the four guys that we have signed, we really think are good football players. They're the kind of guys that we've played with in the past. And the key for them is to continue to develop and get on that. Hopefully, we'll help our depth there because we were pretty lean at that position.

Q. You're not quite getting everybody that you'd like, but obviously that never happens at any school. The fact that you're winning more games, what does this program

need to do to start turning the page and be able to recruit some of the 4 and 5-stars?

COACH FERENTZ: I never got too hung up on that. That's probably a good thing. It's one of our inherent challenges is population. We're a state of 3 million people, so it's going to be a little tougher that way. Anytime you go on outside of your state or region, it becomes more and more of a challenge unless you're one of those big brand named schools. We're proud of who we are.

But to think that we're going to go ahead to head with some of the brand name schools outside of our region probably isn't realistic. So we try to spend more time finding guys that remind us of some of the players that have had success here. If Tony Moeaki or Bryan Bulaga want to take a shot on us, that's a great thing. But going after guys like Chad Greenway and Bob Sanders, Bradley Fletcher, guys like that, we've had a lot of success with players like that too.

It's really going to be true for all the guys that are in this class, be it the scholarship guys or walk-ons that are joining us. It's really what they do once they get here. I really feel confident based on I know they have the requisite abilities to be very good players for us. It's really how hard they want to push and how hard they want to compete here in the next four or five years.

Q. Talk about down the stretch you had coaching shake-ups on your staff that you had to deal with, and obviously you had to address it with recruits... how helpful was it to get through this year knowing that you had stability across the board with your staff as far as being able to ensure that your commitments would stay with you?

COACH FERENTZ: It's good for everybody. It's good for the players and everybody on campus. The way I look at it, we went through 13 years without any major changes, very few major changes. Especially relative to the landscape in college football, and then certainly we've had change over the last two years. Like it or not, I feel like we've geared up for the next 13. I think our players feel that way, and I think that came across to the recruits as well, that we've got things back in place where we want them. We have a good idea of what we're doing and who we want to be, and how we want to do things. I think that's good for our players on campus and good for prospects that are looking at us.

Q. Do you see Matt Nelson staying at defensive end or do you think he can switch sides and become a Riley Reiff?

COACH FERENTZ: I've read about him and a lot of things about him. To answer that last part, no. He's not like Riley, and believe me, we'd take another Riley if we could find one. But it's interesting. I was talking to someone from a pretty prestigious school who thought he was as good a tight end prospect as they've had. His high school coach relayed that to me. I could see that.

But all that being said, we think he's going to be a good defensive end. We were so excited about him and so enthused when he committed to us, I believe it was in June, maybe it was May, I can't remember exactly... but our level of appreciation for him went even higher when he came to camp in June. He didn't have to. He was committed and had a scholarship. He came here and competed. It's one thing to be around players and try to get a feel for them when you get a sense about who they are and just the way he carried himself and the way he wanted to be coached and compete that day, it was really impressive to us. Our intentions are wholly to keep him on that defensive end position, and we're just awfully excited to have him join the class.

Q. These camps you have, they're not padded --

COACH FERENTZ: That one was, yes. It wasn't a combine. It wasn't touch football.

Q. So there is a chance to actually play football and a lot of evaluation comes out of that?

COACH FERENTZ: There is.

Q. Is there a lot of evaluation?

COACH FERENTZ: Again, there are a lot of layers. Like I mentioned, Matt came here, scholarship in hand and committed to us. He could have gone to the pool that day and sat around with the girls, but he chose to come down here. That told us a lot. Jake Rudock, it was us and another school. We were doing all we could to convince him to come. He chose to go out to compete on that Saturday.

Again, that just kind of raised our level of appreciation for him and really confirmed what we thought we knew about him. Then you have other guys that come in that you don't know a lot about that intrigue you with what they do out there on the field. We had a couple of examples of that and

that's kind of how we got involved with Parker Hesse. That kind of amped it up for us a little bit. So those are different levels and different layers and everything we do is really important in terms of the recruiting evaluations.

Q. Do you still enjoy this part of it?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I enjoyed this year a little bit more because we had some sanity in our rules. We didn't have coaches camping out at All-Star games. A bunch of adult coaches harassing parents and families that should be having good family time. That didn't happen. They had a significant dead period which was good for everybody. It starts with the prospects and their families. They need protection too from all this stuff. So I think from that standpoint there is a little more sanity on the flip side of that. The acceleration on the front end continues to go up. I'm not sure I enjoy that, but it's the way of the world. The reason I don't enjoy it so much is there is not, probably not enough structure on that part of it, and it causes people to project a little more and projections can be dangerous. The better information you have, the better you can make a decision. So you've got to find that balance. It's not a tough deal.

As I say, Tony Moeaki, my sister can figure out he's a good prospect. Let's offer him. But some of the others are a little trickier and that's a little tougher.

Q. What's it like when you're talking to his father, who is the coach at a school that he originally committed?

COACH FERENTZ: That was hard. I remember distinctly in the conversations. I remember I was in Nashville in a car talking to Jay. It was hard because I have great respect for their program, Northern Illinois. They have an excellent program. I certainly have great respect for the Niemann family, and the fact that it's the father-son part of it. It was a tough position for everybody. But for Ben and Jay and the family, that ball is in their court all the way. So I just remember talking to Jay after Ben committed, and that's one of those deals. He was happy but obviously sad for obvious reasons. But they're a first class organization at Northern. We're thrilled to have Ben join our football team.

Q. Do they still send it by fax?

COACH FERENTZ: It's mostly email now. I don't think we have any faxes today. I understand the differences, but as long as it gets here, it gets here. That is the biggest thing.

Q. When you have the two classes that have a lot of attrition as I mentioned earlier, did you change anything in the way you recruited from that point on? Did you look at it?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're constantly trying to evaluate what we do, what works, what doesn't work. If there is something that isn't good, we're going to try to pinpoint the reason for that, the same way the other direction. It starts in the recruiting process, and there are a lot of things. Maybe what we miss or didn't see in the recruiting process, and what happens once they get to campus, it's a little like the NFL and free agency. It's really tough to predict sometimes what players are going to do, even before free agency. How are they going to project to be a professional football player. Just because you get paid doesn't make you a pro. There are challenges at every level. That's true in all professions. How are people going to react to their environment and circumstances. So we're constantly looking at that and trying to pinpoint things. I don't know how many absolutes there are. I have a couple theories, but I'm not going to share those right now.

Q. Do you think 2012 may have been your thinnest team since you started going to bowl games?

COACH FERENTZ: That is probably a fair assessment. We got what we deserved. We were a 4-8 football team, and nobody's made excuses for it. We won't. It wasn't a matter of effort, just we weren't good enough. I think we are back where we want to be. That being said, we've got a whole new challenge in front of us. Just like a year ago, this one is in the hopper and now we have to move on. We've got a lot of work to do to get where we want to get.

Q. How thin are you guys maybe we don't know and it's not been on the depth chart, but also offensive tackle seems to be a lean position for you guys?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it was. If there is one position or one prospect, there is one guy that we had targeted in particular. We hoped we would have landed at that position. So that is the

bad news. The good news is I think moving forward there is a really good opportunity to get some players that can fortify that position here in the year coming and recruiting, so I'm not panicking. Also I've seen enough behind the scenes to feel like we're going to be okay. He didn't get any stars, but the biggest recruit we got was Brandon Scherff. Christmas came early this year. I don't know if I'm allowed to say that as a public employee. But it was the best thing that happened in the recruiting season, with all due respect to the guys that are joining us next year.

Q. Chris White jumped right in there after being away from the college game. Talk about his efforts recruiting?

COACH FERENTZ: Chris had some good ties back in that part of the country. He recruited there at Syracuse and up at Holy Cross. So it became apparent to me traveling with him out there, that he had good ties to people out there who really trusted him. And Chris also resonates really well with young people. The guys on our football team were certainly prospects, and Chris is a really impressive guy. He does a great job representing our program. He did a really, really nice job. One thing I pointed out too, I read, I get bored a little bit. I think it was Monday night. Got some free time off the road. I've got that iPad, so I was going to one of those recruiting sites and I can't tell you which one it was, because I don't know. But they were ranking recruiters on staffs in the Big Ten. But it kind of reminds me when they had these all-star games, are they kidding me? But it goes beyond one person. Some guys recruit better than others. But ultimately -- and Bill Snyder taught me this in 1982 -- the school and the program recruit themselves. It's about the University and the program and all the people there. I think it's as impactful as any of the players on our campus. The players and the message they convey to prospects. But you don't get guys from out east to come here unless somebody attracts them out here. That certainly was Chris, he was the guy on the front line there.

Q. Are you surprised you got some of those kids from the east coast to commit before they even stepped foot on campus?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I was. I was surprised and worried. The way things have evolved, I felt great. That is a tribute to Chris. I

think he did a good job of doing his homework. The thing about Terrence, talked to two separate people that have firsthand experience with Don Bosco High School out there. They know about Terrence as a player. Both of them volunteered how impressed they were. One guys coaches out there, and the alum is a pro personnel guy, NFL personnel guy. I respect his opinion. So it's nice reinforcement. You hear people like that say this guy's a good player. Credit to Chris there for identifying him, being involved and getting those guys interested in our program.

Q. What do you guys want to have typically on your team, on every roster? Do you want to have one scholarship punter, one scholarship kicker, one scholarship long snapper now because guys are seniors?

COACH FERENTZ: That would be okay if they're all walk-ons. Like in every position, we're going to investigate what we have to do to have the level of competition that we're hoping for. In a perfect world, yeah. In the old days we'd have specialists come in as walk-ons and earn a scholarship. The thing about Rob Houghtlin, that's how he got here. But things have changed, too. Nate Kaeding came in as a scholarship player, and I'm glad he did. All of our deep snappers have been walk-ons and they've earned it. They've been walk-ons. And they've been exceptional. It's like everything, we're going to do what we have to do to create the competition on the practice field we think is necessary.

Q. Talk about Jay Scheel, his good numbers as quarterback and what do you project at wide receiver?

COACH FERENTZ: Jay became a phenom in our office about three years ago. I think it was his sophomore year. I think it was a game on TV and our guys had a game on film there. All of a sudden he became a legend in an hour. The guys are in the back there and pretty soon everybody's peaking at that tape. So we've known about Jay for quite a while.

We're just really excited about him. He's a tremendous young guy, tremendous personality, great family. We think he'll be a really dynamic player for us. Our intention is to play him at receiver, but who knows what we'll do with him in other ways, but to get the ball in his hands, if we're smart coaches, we'll figure out how to do that.

Q. Do you guys go after more committed recruits than you used to?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so, necessarily. It's all an individual thing. But the guys in this year's class, pretty much once a player committed to us we all felt pretty good about it. Within the last six months, I'd say in that type of timeframe, once you start getting out a year anything can happen and that's just the way it goes. We're not big about knocking on other people's doors unless we have to. It may be open to thought, which they might. We're not big on that. Just not a lot of upside in us doing that.

Q. Early on in Illinois, you had one guy this year, was that an aberration or?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm not really concerned about that. Probably an aberration, but I'm confident we'll be strong in there, and we need to be. I'll add that on top of it. You know, same old deal. You can go to the Chicagoland area and back in the time it takes you to get up to a high school in Northwest Iowa. So a few more people out there though there are a lot of good players in that direction as well. But we need to be strong in there and that's something that we're working hard on. I spent a little time in there last week. I feel good about our name and our exposure in there.

Q. Talk about the offensive linemen in this class?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, both guys that are committed are signed right now, we feel great about. Saw Lucas on TV, he hit a 3 ball. Talked to Matt Nelson, he said it was the only one he had. So it might be a lucky shot, that type of deal. But we think he's a really good football player. And Keegan is another one we've been following for a couple of years. Same thing with him. We think he'll fit well in with that group. Hopefully we'll add another player when camp starts, and we'll keep our fingers crossed there.

Q. When you guys go shopping for quarterbacks and the pro-style thing, how does that play out? You guys look for pro-style quarterbacks?

COACH FERENTZ: We do, but it's not exclusive. It goes back to Brad. Brad probably was still better in the pocket than anybody else. But he had that ability to make plays with his feet. If we can find guys that can do both, we're all for it. But

we definitely want to find a guy that can throw the ball a little bit. I don't think we're fully ready to commit to an option-type offense.

But, again, if there's a dynamic player that's interested in us, we're going to look at him. Tyler's story is a good one. We liked him an awful lot. Last spring committed somewhere else and then opened back up. We saw his senior film. We knew a lot more about him after he had committed. We had the luxury of knowing more about him. We felt good about him prior to that and really felt good about him after his senior season. We're excited that he came out and just thrilled that he chose to come here.

Q. Someone kind of compared Tyler to Jake. Is that your take, are they similar?

COACH FERENTZ: I wouldn't dispute that. I think they're similar in a lot of ways. First and foremost, it's about winning. He's been part of a winning program. He's done a great job up there. They're going to miss him, but we're certainly thrilled to get him.

Q. There were a lot of rumors going around about your son, Brian, going to the Texans. Was that close to happening?

COACH FERENTZ: It's quite a phenomena what you read. With all due respect, don't believe everything you read. Certainly it wasn't in the newspapers, but some of the wires I look at, I'm trained now to look at some of these things. There is a tweet from a pretty official person that had him with both feet down there. So I'm not going to get into the details of it, but I'm thrilled he's here. I'm thrilled our whole staff stayed intact. You never know what's going to happen, but I feel confident we'll all be together at the start of next year.

Just really happy the way things came together this year. Last year at this time I made a comment to a couple of our guys. Last year at this time we had work to do as far as getting the staff completed and putting all the pieces together. So certainly we've moved past signing day. Now we have more time, I think to be prepared for spring. It will be fun to spend more time on studying our tape and other people's tape trying to get our staff put together the way we want. So I'm thrilled about that.

We've had guys through the years that have had opportunity to leave and have chosen to stay. Anytime that happens, I'm appreciative. I

won't speak for our guys, but it's up to them to decide what to do.

Q. Do you have any players on the roster at the end of last season that decided not to come back?

COACH FERENTZ: No news to report there. But it's not unusual to have some transition. We may have that during the course of spring, but no real news story there.

Q. Any injuries?

COACH FERENTZ: Not totally. We may have a guy or two. We'll know more as we move along. We had one of the guys had hand surgery at the end of the season who I think has a chance to be out there. And we just had one, Anthony Gair just had one. So he may be in a cast for spring ball. But I think for the most part we're pretty healthy.

Q. Jake didn't need surgery?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not at all. He needed some rest, and we were finally able to give it to him.

Q. Practice in Des Moines again this year?

COACH FERENTZ: We planned on it, yeah, we sure do. We'll have more to announce on that. We're excited about that, great feedback, and I think second weekend of April we're looking to go in there.

Q. You've had a good reputation of a good offensive line over the years, what about the two you have coming in from Eastern Iowa?

COACH FERENTZ: Lucas kind of snuck up on us a little bit. In the spring we became more aware of him and he had a good junior season. It was one of the places I got to stop in our first bye week. I was up there that Friday night. Really impressed with the way he played. I like the fact that he plays other sports. He's really involved and a very good basketball player on a very good team obviously. So I think those are all pluses.

We like him an awful lot. Think he has a great future here, and feel the same way about Keegan. Keegan is a hard-nosed guy, a physical guy. We had a chance to watch him on tape, and really impressed with him, and we were able to get him committed. So we're happy about that.

Q. Outside of the offensive tackle that you mentioned, what are other areas of interest in 2015?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we've kind of been, I don't want to say stealing from our offensive line pool, but we've been cutting it pretty close over the last couple years recruiting for that position. So that is one area we need to make sure we really address it. Based on what I know right now, we have a good opportunity to do that. So I'm confident about that. That would be the first and foremost thing on my mind right now. Then we'll disburse the other scholarships.

We've gone pretty hard with the defensive position the last few years, so I'm not saying we won't take players, but I don't expect us to sign five at each position. That's not going to happen next year. Probably more balanced at every position, but the offensive line is a critical area for us right now.

Q. It takes a lot of confidence, I imagine, when you guys make your call and offer a guy, like Lucas, for example, the only other offer was Northern Colorado, to stay with that because you guys see something that apparently the rest of the world does not?

COACH FERENTZ: It doesn't. We're not in tune with who is doing what, though it becomes apparent if everybody in the world is on a guy, that becomes pretty apparent. Other people we don't worry too much about it. I read this morning -- I guess it's true, just to give you a warning about reading stuff -- I read that Russell Wilson was a two-star recruit. I know Jim Reid was trying to get him at Richmond and thought he had a chance. So beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I think you have to trust what you see and what you believe.

The biggest thing we look for and try to do, and this goes back to Rick's question earlier. We try to identify the best parts about the guys that have come through our program, and then kind of go from there. If we see those traits or attributes in a prospect, then we kind of go that direction. There is nothing that's full-proof, nothing is. So you just have to live with your decisions sometimes.

Q. Some of those traits, are they mental, physical?

COACH FERENTZ: It's everything. Again, another thing I read recently, and this I think is true. I read a nice article on Ron Wolf about ten days ago about his school's scouting and what have you. In the article there is a quote in there

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about making exceptions and drafting. And Tom Landry is a guy who said if you take an exception you'll have a team full of exceptions, and I would beg to differ with that.

If you're at the Dallas Cowboy level and they had a great, great football team and there wasn't free agency, I could see them not making exceptions. They were big on computer scouting and all that kind of stuff. But when you're at Iowa, I think you have to look at the world a little differently and you have to be open to a Bob Sanders, Dallas Clark, guys like that that maybe don't pass the eye test but still make up for it in other areas.

I think it's true in pro football now through free agency. I totally appreciate what he said. It doesn't work here. There are schools that maybe you can have those requisite deals. But for us we have to look at the broader picture.

Q. Every position competes year after year, does C.J. Beathard have a chance to unseat Jake next season?

COACH FERENTZ: Jake really established himself this year. We thought C.J. was really going to have to mount a push there, and he did preseason. The good news to me is right now we have confidence in both those guys. They both to me have proven that we can win games with them, yeah. Put them out there as starters and win games with them.

That being said, C.J. still has some catching up to do. Jake has really accelerated. The one thing we didn't know about either of the guys was their physical toughness. Jake certainly proved that. We don't want our guys to get hit in practice. That's just how it is. He more than proved that. I think C.J. did too. We feel good about those guys. We'll let them both compete. It's only fair to both of them that the best guys start.

The good news is a year ago, it's kind of like the running back position two years ago, whereas right now we feel we have two guys that we feel like we can win Big Ten games with. I expect both those guys to play better next year and compete even harder, so that is going to be a good thing for our football team.

But every position on the offensive line, if Scherff gets beat out, shame on Scherff. That is his fault. But every position on our football team will be open when we get going in the spring. The guys know that. They've been told that. That's just how it works. This is a competitive exercise.

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Q. How about you have a few running backs that you red-shirted. LeShun played, but Akrum and Roger, some of those guys, how do you think they're going to fit?

COACH FERENTZ: Those guys showed good things. They really did, so happy about them. Now it's a matter of what they can do running on our offense. We have to learn more about them. They've got to physically mature a little bit and move along in that direction. But we're really pleased with all those guys. So that turned out to be a good class. Going back to last year, we were hoping they'd be, and after seven months or six months whatever it's been, we feel good about where they're at so far. So what are they going to do the next step? This spring will be fun to watch those guys.

Q. There is also a handful of receivers and there have been reports that a couple of those guys have a real chance?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we're excited to see how they do too. Again, in December same thing. We got to work with those guys a little bit. Not singling one guy out, but Derrick Mitchell made a good catch at our practice Jon Gruden attended down there in Tampa. I'm sure he was looking at the depth chart and figuring these coaches aren't very smart. That kid looks like a good player, wonder why he's not playing.

So we're here to let those guys compete. Now the next question is they've shown some requisite ability, now they have to know everything to do with the offense, audibles and those kinds of things. They shouldn't be at the level of Kevonte at this point, but how far can we push them in August to get them to compete and enter into the mix? That would be great for our football team.

Q. Do you expect Reggie Spearman to move to defensive end?

COACH FERENTZ: No. I mean, never say never, but our intention right now is to play him at linebacker. One of the reasons we've played him this year, and that was a jump ball discussion. It's a little bit like the A.J. Edds thing where you have three seniors graduating and had he been playing a different position, we may have redshirted him. But we felt it was good to get him on the field, get him active, get him a role so he'll be better prepared and more confident to compete for a job this spring. Our intention is to keep him at the linebacker position.

Q. Keep Nate Meier at defensive end?

COACH FERENTZ: We plan on that, yeah, absolutely. Not moving him to running back.

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