

November 2, 2010



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome. Just a couple things here first of all. Captains are the same four guys. We have Adrian on defense with Karl Klug, then Ricky Stanzi joining Julian Vandervelde offensively.

It was a good win this past weekend certainly. We're thrilled about that. The crowd was just outstanding. We appreciate the fan support. They were with us from the first snap right to the end. Appreciate that. Now we move on and play Indiana, who's coming off a tough loss, but a good game against Northwestern. They're a team that really has a very high-powered offense. Their quarterback is an excellent player. They're throwing the ball around very well again this year.

All you have to do is look back to last year. We were very fortunate to get out with a win. I thought they had us on the ropes. Certainly it took a miracle play for us to get back into the game. We've had tough games with these guys through the years. Back to '07, they beat us thoroughly, got the ball rolling in '06.

Another challenge, going on the road playing another Big Ten team. We'll do our best to get ready during the course of the week here.

Q. How is the health of the team?

COACH FERENTZ: It's okay. We've got some guys dinged up. Unfortunately looks like Tyler Nielsen is going to miss weeks, not days. He's going to be out for a while. And I think after that, everybody's got a shot to play. We got a shot to maybe get some other guys back. We'll see how things go.

Q. What is Nielsen's injury?

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COACH FERENTZ: He's got a neck issue. It's a tough thing. A lot of people took for granted we graduated three pretty good players from our football team defensively. All three of those guys are NFL players. I think Tyler just jumped in there and did a great job from day one. He's been playing tremendous football for us. That's an important position in our defense as we know. He's really done a great job. It's a tough loss for us. First and foremost, it's tough on Tyler. As an individual he wants to play out there, it means an awful lot to him. He's going to be out for a while. We have to try to get through that. It's tough. We'll just see what happens here.

Q. Petersen, who steps in behind him?

COACH FERENTZ: He did on Saturday. We'll see who's healthy during the course of the week and what are options are as we're going on. We're getting a little thin at the linebacker spot. You probably noticed that. A little thin like that. Getting younger. We're getting younger as we get thinner.

That being said, it's a great opportunity. James Morris stepped in and did a nice job Saturday, brought some energy out there. It was a real plus in the game certainly. With that comes opportunity. Shane DiBona did a good job. Troy played well. Those guys split the weak side position. Keep moving guys around, see what happens. It makes it interesting.

Q. How about Tarpinian, he played a lot in the 3-4. Do you expect him to be on the field a little more?

COACH FERENTZ: That's one of the positives. He came out of the game clean. At least he didn't move backwards at all. The report I got this morning is maybe he's gaining a little ground right now. Hopefully we can increase his role Saturday. Starting with special teams, that's one thing. The injuries are taking their toll,

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especially on our special teams. Dakota Getz, a guy nobody has noticed or said much about, he's been out a couple weeks. He was just starting to play on special teams, too.

Hopefully getting Tarp back will help us and I hope he has a good week.

Q. How do you feel about Christian Kirskey and his progress?

COACH FERENTZ: He's gaining ground, too. Probably have to play a more significant role this coming week. We'll keep pushing the young guys along. More opportunity now.

Q. Question mark surrounding Chappell, whether or not he's going to be healthy. How does that affect you defensively?

COACH FERENTZ: The only thing there, he may not be thinking run first because he runs the ball effectively, too. Might limit his ability to do that. Key word there is 'might'. I expect him to be in there. He throws that football around pretty well. Does a nice job of running their offense. Did a nice job last year. We're certainly going to prepare like he's going to be in there running their entire offense. I don't know how that will affect the run game a little bit.

Q. Passing game is one of the best in the nation.

COACH FERENTZ: They've got excellent receivers, good scheme, very well-conceived scheme. They were a good offensive football team a year ago, they're building on that. When you have a fifth-year quarterback like that, that helps. They've got some excellent receivers, too, as they did in the past. That's been a problem for us matching up with those guys.

Q. What did you think of the combo interception after you saw it on tape?

COACH FERENTZ: Looked as good on tape as it did Saturday. I'm okay with that one. Not quite sure why I did it, but it worked out fine. Somebody alluded to Tyler's Sash's basketball career. I told you before, I saw him in sixth grade, seventh grade. He wasn't throwing many assists back then. If the ball went to him, it stayed there. It was usually going in the direction of the basket. He's matured. Football has brought out some good attributes in him.

Q. And Norm?

COACH FERENTZ: Norm is gaining ground. Great having him in the stadium. He will not travel this week. I think we're probably anywhere from like five to eight days, based on what I know, before he comes home. We're gaining ground here. It was great having him there. He was certainly enthused. I think we're getting real close to him coming back home. The next step will be getting him in the office a couple hours a day, that type of thing. But he won't be here Saturday.

Q. Looking back on the Michigan State game, taking a look at the film, this had to be one of the Iowa's finest games, did it not?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I haven't looked at it big picture-wise. We had it going all three phases. It starts there. I think the biggest thing was we played better on special teams. That's kind of been hindering us during the course of this season.

A lot of times it's subtle stuff, but field position is a big thing. It's better to have a good defense or easier to play good defense when they have to get 80 or 75 yards as opposed to 50. I thought we covered more aggressively. That was number one on the list. Seemed that way from the sidelines. I thought looking at the tape it looked the same way.

Our temperament was better on special teams. If we can continue to build on that, that could be a good thing for us. Hopefully we're moving in the right direction. Donahue punted very well. He's been doing it all season long, but he had a great day punting. Those are the things that help us play better football. I think everything else fed off of that. But that was a positive step.

Q. You're someone who always talks that November starts to make things matter a bit. Not to talk about September, October. There's eight teams within a game and a half of first place. Is that what you expected in the Big Ten?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't really have any expectations. I did peek at it Sunday night, I think I was reading the papers. The only conclusion I came up with was, yeah, exactly, I think there were three teams that had more than two losses in the conference. Anything can happen in the next month. That's what makes it interesting. I don't know how that compares to

other conferences. Historically the Big Ten has been fairly wide open since '81. Iowa helped break that ice after 13 years of same old stuff.

So that's what makes it interesting. Yeah, this month will be a good month for fans to be paying attention.

Q. Is this going to be a little different? Will you miss it in the future with the division, title game?

COACH FERENTZ: I've never been involved in that. I don't know. I guess you cut it right in half. Six teams instead of looking at 11. Had to think about that for a minute. I haven't looked that far ahead. Yeah, it will be different.

Q. November is traditionally where your players say this is when it really starts to count. Do you see them taking that mentality, starting a week early?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope we do. Last week was a good week. I hope this one's a good week. You look back to '06, that wasn't such a good month there. We didn't do much in November that year.

If you're going to have a good team and have a good season, you have to play well in November. I think that goes without saying. We'll find out where we're at in four weeks, three and a half weeks.

Q. You played a lot of 3-4 on Saturday, sprinkled in a little bit of nickel as well. How do you think you performed when you went to those changes?

COACH FERENTZ: It was effective for us. I think the birth of that package, if you will, was Alamo Bowl '01. The team we were playing was a spread attack. One way for us to get a substitute of personnel out there. These teams that have five receivers, all that type of thing, it's just part of the package.

That's the good news. It's been effective for us. The bad news is it takes four backers instead of three. Every time I look at our depth chart, we keep going the wrong way on numbers. We'll have to see what we can do here. Throw it up on the board and see what it looks like.

Q. The season that Ricky is having now, should he be getting more national attention?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's a pretty good player. We felt like he was pretty good for a

while. Right now he's really playing at a high rate. It's a real credit to him, credit to his teammates. He's worked extremely hard. He continues to do a great job.

I don't know that his statistics, I don't know how it compares nationally, I'm not really paying attention. I know there's a quarterback at Auburn that has a lot of people talking, a great player. There are a lot of great players out there. But Ricky is doing a great job of leading our team right now, his decisions. His touchdown-to-interception ratio is really impressive. I heard that on the news recently. That's pretty impressive.

Q. Indiana's coach talked yesterday that at some point he'll show his team the first three quarters of last year's game, but not the fourth. You think maybe you guys were looking ahead. Are there things to be learned from last year's tape?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure if we were looking ahead or weren't. The facts are we were on the ropes, we were clearly on the ropes. In '07 we weren't on the ropes. We got knocked out of the ring right away in '07. We did okay in '08. Again, we had Shonn Greene. I don't think he's coming back this weekend. We better be ready to go.

That's conference play. Going to be that way the next four weeks. I don't care who we're playing. We better get ready to play. We haven't had it easy with these guys. We just need to get ready.

Q. Do you plan on giving Marcus Coker more carries in the future?

COACH FERENTZ: I think I said last week we actually planned on playing him two weeks ago and didn't. We didn't script it out. But, again, we restated that point on Thursday in our meeting that we were going to get him out there and play him and we did.

For us, we're into whatever week it is now, four games to go here. It's not like the Big Ten has 12 games. We've played eight games, anyway. We're going to need him down the road here. We'll just keep pushing him forward. It was a good outing. That was the varsity out there hitting him. I thought he did a good job in those circumstances. That was a tough situation. A lot of times he was carrying the ball. They knew we were going to run the ball. Hit a couple nice runs, negated by a

penalty.

He's doing a better job in practice. He missed time. That was the only thing. He missed that big block of practice time. He's getting caught up. We're going to need more than him. Keep bringing our young guys along.

Q. After such a big win like last Saturday, as a coach do you worry about your team having that one-week hangover, celebrating too much?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think I said Saturday afternoon you always worry about something. Right right now we're worried about prosperity. A week ago we were worried about being in the ditch. There's always something to worry about. That's just how it goes.

Last week I'm sure there was some negativity, I'm just guessing, out there as our guys went around campus, read newspapers, all that type of thing. This week I'm sure we're heroes. The truth is somewhere in the middle usually.

Last week can get forgotten real fast. I know that. That's sports and that's life. We got to enjoy it Sunday, now we go back to work Monday. That's how it goes. We'll start today.

Q. In light of the issues that are affecting the basketball program right now, you have a lot of athletes on your sidelines, former athletes, NFL players, a lot of recruits at the game as well. Are you concerned ever that could trigger a violation?

COACH FERENTZ: I could break my leg getting off this stand, too. So many things can happen. I'm not going to go into a commentary here. But, yeah. There's reasons they have rules and all that. I guess it could happen. We have players in the locker room, sometimes recruits come in the locker rooms. You have to make sure they have the code of silence. But you just have to be careful. That's all you can do.

I'm not going to forbid our players from coming in the locker room, our former guys. I'm not going to tell an honorary captain he can't come in. We typically bring recruits in the locker room, too. It's just one of those deals. We try to keep them separate.

From what I heard about the other case, it was very inadvertent. Those things happen all across the country. It's one of those deals.

Q. What kind of advantage do you think your line has against Indiana's line? They haven't been able to rush the ball much.

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, a big part of their rushing attack got hurt when they lost their back. They had an excellent running back. That took a piece out of their attack certainly. We've kind of suffered from that a little bit, too.

So injuries affect you. But we still have to be prepared to take the run. Right now they've kind of gone the other direction. They're throwing it I think over 300 yards a game. That's kind of the avenue they've chosen. We've got a veteran line, no question about that. The bad news is, that ball comes out pretty quickly. He's not back there holding it.

To think we're going to get there for sacks, I don't think we can count on that happening. We're going to have to try to do our best, play good coverage. They're efficient with what they do offensively.

Q. Is that why you switched to a 3-4 and nickel to combat that quick passing game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's just a change-up. There's no sense rushing a lot of guys 'cause typically that ball is going to come out. You put yourself at a disadvantage typically.

Q. You played five games against top-25 teams already this year, more than any other team in the Big Ten. How battle tested do you feel that makes your team and how much of an advantage can that be?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I mean, we are battle tested, I would agree with that. We paid for it too, a little bit, with injuries and what have you.

The biggest thing is our team's improving as we go along. We showed improvement Saturday. I'm not sure we did the week before in some areas. That's what we're focused on, trying to continue to improve.

The good thing about youth, the good thing about our team right now, we're capable of getting a lot better, and we're going to have to. I'll flip it around. We're playing three out of four this month on the road. Certainly every game on that schedule, I felt this way back in August, every game on our schedule is winnable. They're also all basically teams that could beat us. It's certainly true once you get into conference play. I don't think there's a team in the league that couldn't beat

us, and conversely, if we play well, we have an opportunity to win most games. That's the challenge as it stands right now. There's going to be a road ingredient right now. We have three out of four on the road right now. That's what we're looking at.

Q. Marvin makes two plays Saturday. He's still growing.

COACH FERENTZ: He's a better player. I made this point in the Big Ten teleconference. Both those guys are high school quarterbacks. Derrell obviously came here as a receiver. When he got here, he enlisted right in that boot camp. Marvin didn't switch over till mid-season '08. Basically all he was doing was running routes. Didn't know how to play receiver, didn't have any on-the-job training. He's had the benefit in the spring of a couple summer camps, two summer camps, I guess, yeah, he's getting better.

Both the guys are improving with each time out there. Clearly it's the most experienced group that we've had. You probably argue the most talented, too. Having those guys with a quarterback that's really playing well is a good thing for us.

Q. Can you talk about Shaun Prater's play?

COACH FERENTZ: Played well. Shaun has always been a very competitive guy. I think he cleaned some things up, came up with the big interception, which was great, and actually ran it towards their goal line. That's two in a row now. He's learning on that front, too.

He competes, does a good job on special teams as well. That's something that doesn't get talked about much. He does a real nice job on special teams. That's at a premium, too.

Q. Talk about your turnover margin. How much of that is attitude and preparation on your part versus sometimes the ball bounces your way or it doesn't?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's a little bit of it. That's something we've tried to coach. I've said before, I'm not a huge statistic guy. I think they're starting to make a little bit more -- have a little bit more value right now as you go along here in November.

That's one that counts anytime of the season. If you're not doing a good job in that area, it's tough to have a successful team, unless you're

so superior, which we've never been in that category.

It helps. It's a combination of the guys responsible for ball security doing a great job. Might be a lineman or someone protecting the punt return guy. Everybody has some responsibility there. Then the flipside of it is the takeaways. Our defense has done a great job the last couple years really getting the takeaways. That was a big part of the game the other day, too. I think it was three-zip in turnovers. That really helps you. If you can do that and play good on special teams, you got a shot.

Q. Do you ever encourage your guys to go vote one way or another?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I should have, and I didn't. I'll write that down next year. Maybe I'll do it. Do we vote every year? I don't know. I snuck out and did it Friday. My wife reminded me. I appreciate that. Tuesdays are a little tough. But, yeah, I should of. I blew that one. I should have.

Q. At the end of the game when there's the big crazy scene when the coaches shake hands, what is your point of view?

COACH FERENTZ: If we're in Kinnick, it's great. If we are somewhere else, it's not so good because it means we just got beat. So it's not a good thing.

I don't mind it at all. Recently I think I've had about 10 bodyguards, for whatever reason. But the best way to get out is to go right to the wall and right down. That's the best way to get out. I learned that in the '80s.

Q. Do you sprint?

COACH FERENTZ: If you can. I have this entourage now, so it's almost ridiculous. I don't have to. I can't because there's so many people around.

Q. You mentioned the Indiana receivers. They are one, two, three in the Big Ten in receptions. Are they similar players or different?

COACH FERENTZ: They're different. One guy really has good size. They've got size. They're all very skilled. Chappell does a nice job throwing it around. Seems like they've always got good skill guys. Going back to Hardy. We didn't

cover him in two years. Thank goodness he came out early. I think he did.

Anyway, it just seems like they find guys. I think all three of them are Indiana natives, too. I might be wrong on that one. We probably need to recruit hard in Indiana. But they have good receivers. Again, that's how they're built. They're throwing that football really well right now.

Q. How far away is Jeremiha Hunter?

COACH FERENTZ: I think he's got a realistic shot to be with us. I think 'with us' like hopefully today. He didn't do much last week. Just didn't really respond. I think realistically based on what we know, got a shot. Hope he doesn't go backwards, that's the other thing. That would help to get one back.

Q. Are you surprised at all how James Morris has been able to I don't want to say seamlessly but step into the quarterback position?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. For any freshman to step in there and play a significant role, that's not easy. But then right along with that, the things we thought we saw in him during the recruitment process, watching his career, I think they just surfaced. He's got a great personality. He's an intelligent guy, and football intelligent. He's a communicator. He's not bashful.

That's because he knows what he's doing. He's worked hard at it, all that. The older guys have taken him under their wing, too. They're watching tape with him, explaining things to him, showing him how to go about things. It's been a team effort that way. I appreciate what our older guys do there.

But he's a good football player. He's aggressive. To say we foresaw this, I don't think any of us -- we were all hoping Jeff would be our middle linebacker, James would get some on-the-job training, and he would go at the appropriate time he was called. He's done a really good job.

Q. He committed as a sophomore, does the help he had three years in high school where he was around the program, was he watching practices, anything like that?

COACH FERENTZ: He came around certainly last spring. He's been busy. He's one of those guys that does eight sports over there. He hasn't had a lot of time to be here. He has a great

football aptitude. He's grown up around it, which I think helps. It's certainly an advantage.

I think it's more so just the way he's wired. He's got a good football mentality. He's very serious about it, committed. Excellent student on top of it. That part is equally impressive. The reports I've been getting every week are equally positive. Finds time to do both, so he must not have much social time. But that's okay.

Q. You ID'd him as middle linebacker before camp. Was that always the plan for him?

COACH FERENTZ: Not in my mind necessarily. But Norm and Derrell both thought that was the best spot for him. I wasn't sure I agreed. Just like I wasn't sure when I agreed us going nickel against Northwestern in 2000. History proved that to be a pretty good deal.

I think right now this is working out right now. But that being said, he can do a lot of things. He can play any three of the positions, linebacker positions, which is a good thing.

Q. Could he have played offense, do you think?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. He's not going to do that this week, I know that.

Q. Can you talk about Brad Herman. He's probably a more physical blocker than people give him credit for.

COACH FERENTZ: He's quietly improved his blocking. I say 'quietly.' It's been a process. It's really been this entire year, too. I think since camp started, he's doing a good job that way. I mentioned special teams on Saturday. One of the highlights, every catch Brad was involved with was -- those are the kind of plays you hope a tight end can make for you.

We've been lucky. We've had guys that can do some really nice things. I thought all three of those catches, I think he had three, they were all big catches. The one on the crossing route I thought was for sure we weren't getting that one. Next thing he came out of there with the ball, came out running. If we can get that kind of play for him, I think that's all ahead of him right now, that's exciting.

Thank you.

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