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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: It's certainly good to get started. First of all, obviously I think all of us are thrilled about the events this weekend surrounding the game. We're excited about the game, too, but for Coach Fry to be back in town and be recognized in such a nice way and a well deserved way, I think all of us are extremely excited about that. I don't think I have to talk about the impact that Coach Fry has had on the program, our football program, and the University and the state overall.

So it's going to be great to have he and Shirley back in town, and we'll look forward to this week. I know he's very excited about that.

As far as our football team, just a couple things. We announced last week that Jayme Murphy unfortunately had to undergo back surgery. Jayme has had a series of injuries throughout his career. We talked a while back about him being a senior this year, and he did scrimmage in the open scrimmage a couple Saturdays ago. After that he just came in and said, you know, he couldn't go any further. He really gave it a great effort. So it's extremely unfortunate. He's doing a lot better, immediately after the surgery felt a lot better, and that's good news. He's got a road back now for recovery.

But hopefully he can join us in some form helping us out as a student assistant. I think he has interest in that, and we certainly have a mutual interest there. It's a tough loss. Jayme is a tremendous young person, great student, and he's really been one of the inspirational guys on our team, outstanding special teams player, one of the best we've had in the past decade, so we feel badly about that for obvious reasons.

As far as the game goes this week, coming into this week really there are only two guys that we anticipated being out; Julian Vandervelde, he's still working back and that's going well, but he won't be ready to play this week; and Jewel Hampton, we didn't foresee him being ready this week, and unfortunately it looks right now like he is not going to make it back, period, this year. So it looks at this point like it's an injury that's going to require surgery, and certainly we feel badly for Jewel on that front.

Probably the only good thing I can say is it didn't happen in the fifth game. That's probably good news if you want to put a positive spin on it. And the other good news is it's a repairable injury, and he'll be back full strength here. But it's not going to be this fall. So that's unfortunate, needless to say.

Besides that, everybody else has an opportunity to be back. We've had a lot of injuries during the last couple weeks probably like every other team in America, and I think everybody has got a realistic chance to be in the lineup or back on the field, so hopefully things will settle down this week and we'll have a little better grip on where we're at there.

Probably the only thing I was going to mention coming into this thing, up until Jewel's development, I was going to mention let's not talk about it until we see what happens because going into this week I had no idea what was going to happen. And the same thing with Bryan Bulaga; I'd request that we put the NFL talk on the shelf for about four months and let him play the season like everybody else on our team, and then after that we can address that when it's appropriate.

Our captains this week will be A.J. Edds and Pat Angerer on defense. We've got Tony Moeaki on offense along with Rick Stanzi, so it gives us four guys that will do a great job that way.

We're playing a team in Northern Iowa that's had very, very strong success for a long

time. They were good in the '80s when I was here, and certainly have continued to do very, very well ever since Coach Farley has been there. I think they've won three out of the last four Conference Championships. They've been in the playoffs and have just had tremendous success. All their older players have experienced a lot of success during their careers, and they're an outstanding football program.

If you look at them, they're almost a flip of us in some ways. They're more veteran on the offensive side of the football, a lot of guys back, a lot of good players, fast, dangerous receivers. Their line is veteran, and certainly the quarterback has done a great job. Grace has been a very good player for them both in the running game and throwing game.

And then on defense, I think their strengths are up front if you look at them. They lost two guys off their front seven, and they added Elijah Hodge, so it's almost like they've only lost one guy. He's certainly a proven player, very, very veteran up front, young in the secondary, and their defensive end Ruffin is an outstanding football player.

We expect quite a challenge. We know that's on one front. They're an excellent team. And then the other front, obviously like any first game, we're all anxious, just like I'm sure they are, and every coach in America, just anxious to see how we perform out on the game field. We've been on the practice field now for a couple weeks, and certainly I think every team going into their first game has things they're concerned about, and we're just anxious to see how things pull together, how the team reacts to playing in an actual game.

It'll be great to get started. We need a good week first, and hopefully we'll be ready to go when Saturday comes around.

Q. Talk about Northern Iowa's offensive line. They have experience. Maybe they don't have the size that you guys have, but they do have the experience. How does that play into things?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, they are experienced and they're very multiple offensively. I'm just looking down, they're bigger than we are, I think. Most teams are, although our tackles are starting to put us back in the race. Typically if you look at most teams we're not as big as they are, and certainly it's the case with these guys.

They're very well coached. Coach Nelson does a great job with their guys up there. They are veteran, and their whole offense, they're efficient,

they're very multiple. They give us as much to prepare for as anybody we're going to play. Part of the reason they can do that is they've got veteran players, so it helps. It starts with the quarterback, too; he really keeps them in the right things and knows how to execute.

Q. With Paki O'Meara and Adam Robinson, what have they done to earn spots 1 and 2?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, coming in, Jewel would have been our -- he was our most experienced guy, and he had the edge coming in. But Paki has played well for a couple years now. We had our last big scrimmage, full scrimmage, a week ago Friday night, and I thought that was his best performance as a Hawkeye, so we were happy to see that. It doesn't count obviously, but the point there is I think his game continues to improve and he made some good plays in all areas, not just running the football, catching it, blocking and all those types of things.

Adam is a guy that caught our eye last year at this time during camp, ended up being a red shirt player which wasn't a big surprise but he just very quietly has emerged and done a nice job in all three areas. At this point that's our one-two tandem and then we'll see what happens after that. This week will help determine that a little bit.

Q. Any idea, Brinson and Wegher, are they 100 percent, are they in the mix?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, they both have -- I'm trying to think if anybody has been clear. Paki has been pretty steady all the way through, but the other three guys, they've all had little issues. Jeff is probably the most significant, so he's missed the most time out of all the guys. That's put him behind a little bit.

Brandon has had a little bit of a setback, but he's been back for a while now. He's gaining ground, too. I think we just keep an open mind on this whole thing right now and my guess is probably by the end of the season we'll see all four of those guys being involved if they can stay healthy and pick up what's going on.

Q. Are you comfortable with linebacker by committee? Is that that big a committee?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know if it's going to be a two-man, three-man, four-man but we'll do whatever it takes to be effective out

there. Like any young players, you worry about certain things, most notably just knowing their assignments, protections, things like that. I go back to Sam Brownlee in 2004, the one thing he never did, he didn't turn it over and never missed an assignment in terms of blitz pickups, those kinds of things. Those are the first two things you worry about I think with the running back.

But to answer the question, I am comfortable. I think the guys have practiced well, and I'm optimistic they'll do some good things as we move forward.

Q. How has Jewel taken the news it's not going to happen this year?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, when it first comes to you, it's in a negative impact. Obviously it's tough to deal with. I've said that many times. I think the hardest thing in football is dealing with guys' injury problems. If it requires surgery, that's significant. That's tough. And the road back is tough. It's lonely. You feel isolated from the team. You've got a long road ahead.

So it's hard. It's just hard. Guys work hard to play. That's what they're focused on is having an opportunity to play, and I know he was really looking forward to this year. But it looks like it's not going to work out. So we're just going to have to deal with it, and you go through that period of feeling bad and then you go to -- hopefully you move onto the stage very quickly thereafter, what do I have to do to maximize my opportunity.

We've had a lot of good players that have gone through situations like this, Chad Greenway went through it I believe it was his second year on campus if I'm not mistaken and then his rookie year as an NFL player, and he continues to have a great career right now. Unfortunately it's part of the territory if you play football. But I think he'll do a good job with it.

Q. Is it an ACL?

COACH FERENTZ: He's got a knee, knee surgery, so that's what he's facing.

Q. Were you waiting for some healing or --

COACH FERENTZ: We obviously thought he had a chance to make it back. A little bit ironic, I won't go into great detail, but he has practiced. I mentioned that in camp right before the open scrimmage is when he got hurt, so he was doing things that were heavy-duty football things, and unfortunately the episode that triggered the --

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tipped him over the balance was hardly of that category. He's been in a lot more strenuous exerting positions. It's just one of those things and it can happen to anybody. But certainly it's just unfortunate.

Q. Is that what kept him out of the spring?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not related at all. This is going back to the shot that was heard around the world back in June.

Q. Along with Brandon, how many other true freshmen do you see playing along with Brandon?

COACH FERENTZ: I was trying to keep a lid on that, but I think the Big Ten Network exposed us totally last week. Brandon has done a nice job, Keenan Davis has done a nice job, and then we're trying to keep a lid on Micah Hyde a little bit, too. We couldn't hide Hyde, I guess. We plan on playing those three guys, and after that we'll tread water a little bit probably.

Q. How has Dace Richardson done?

COACH FERENTZ: He's done really well. It's one of the good stories. Again, we talked about the injury road and all that, and his has been as significant as anybody's on the team, and I'm just really happy to say he continues to progress. He's very up beat, very appreciative, I think, not to us but just appreciative of the fact that he's got an opportunity. He's excited about playing.

Anytime you add a guy that's a veteran guy like him, a senior player, it's a great thing. It's a good story, and I just hope he has a great year.

Q. Is he going to slide inside once Calloway comes back?

COACH FERENTZ: We haven't looked that far down the road. We had so many guys in and out. I joked on the Big Ten Network, Nolan McMillan, who's a freshman lineman, who's a math major, and I'm going to ask him to work on what the probabilities were of us having so many lineups last spring or this past camp. But we'll cross that bridge when we get there.

But probably. He looked good there in the spring, and we just haven't had a chance to work him there in camp just due to injuries.

Q. You have like 100 combined starts

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or something like that coming back on the offensive line. Have you ever had that much experience before and how does it help?

COACH FERENTZ: I read that somewhere, and I was trying to figure out where that -- I don't know if they counted the coaches in there, too, or what. But I assume Dace probably factored in.

But yeah, we do have experience right now, and the frustrating thing is just trying to figure out where we're at because we've had a lot of guys in and out as I said a minute ago.

We feel good about our younger players, too, right now. We've got some younger guys that have been working hard to gain ground, guys like Riley Reiff and Markus Zusevics.

So it's a good thing, but the big thing is what we do this year, how we perform. Raf Eubanks, on that topic, he's a guy who has started, and I think he's really had his best stretch of football since he's been here. So that's what you're hoping to see, certainly with older players especially. They should be better players than they were a year ago, and I think that's what we've seen with Raf for sure. Dan Doering has had a good camp. He's done some good things. So it's good to see those kinds of things, but we're not there yet, that's for sure.

Q. You're no stranger to FCS football. When you look at the outside from Northern Iowa, why have they been such a kingpin in FCS football?

COACH FERENTZ: It's interesting because when I was here in the '80s I used to think about that a little bit. At that time it was Southwest Missouri State, and I recruited in St. Louis. There are an awful lot of really good football players that don't get offered Division I or BCS-level scholarships. We've had our share here, guys that came here as walk-ons and ended up being great football players.

You wonder how a guy like Bryce Paup didn't end up at Iowa or Iowa State, or Chad Henning, another example.

I think you have an opportunity if you have a good eye to maybe find some real good football players, and they've done, I think, a great job historically at Northern Iowa, and certainly under Coach Farley's watch they've done a real good job there. Occasionally they'll get a transfer to come in or what have you.

But you look at a guy like James Ruffin, he could play anywhere in the country. He's an

excellent football player. Two things, they've identified something in recruiting and then also they've done a great job with their players once they get to campus.

Once a guy gets there, they can lift weights and do all those kinds of things, strength and conditioning improvements, you can do that anywhere, doesn't just have to be at a BCS conference school. If your structure is right, got the right people working with players, they've got an excellent coaching staff, good things can happen.

Q. What is Colin Sandeman's status right now?

COACH FERENTZ: He's missed an awful lot of time, so he's a guy we're really not sure of right now. He has a chance to play. He'll be on the field this week. He's been trying to work back, but I'm just not sure where we're at right now.

Q. Julian Vandervelde, what is his timetable like?

COACH FERENTZ: He's going to be working this week individually, maybe a little bit of group stuff, but he's getting close, but he's not there. He may be able to play a little bit a week from now, but I can't see him -- we're not counting on him next week or even the week after. I think realistically if he's full speed by Big Ten play, excellent. It could happen sooner, but he's missed 20, 25 practices, 24 practices, so that's a huge part of the preseason. There's a reason you go to camp for as long as you do.

Guys that have been hurt and out for a while, that's the battle they're facing.

Now, the good news for Julian, he probably looks as good as he ever has. He's been running more than he ever has in his life. I don't think he's happy about that, but if you can't block, I guess you go out and run. Most linemen would rather be blocking, so that's the bad news for him.

Q. Calloway --

COACH FERENTZ: He's coming around. He worked last week and looked good. But again, he's missed some time, too, so he's got some catching up to do and just keep working hard.

Q. Is it going to be a game day decision on Lowe or Castillo at the other corner spot?

COACH FERENTZ: Game day or this

week. We'll watch them practice this week. We've got three big days here right now, so that position, our returners, we haven't made up our mind there. So there's some things this week that we'll just keep looking at and see how the guys do.

Q. Fair to say the running back is the biggest concern you have heading into week 1?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm an optimist. I think guys are going to come through and do a good job. We're not going into the season having any excuses. I'm just curious to see how everything pulls together right now. That's certainly an area we don't have a lot of experience, and couple it with the fact that we lost just an outstanding performer. So that's a little bit more prominent in terms of focus.

Q. As far as those four guys, what might separate them, blocking or not turning it over?

COACH FERENTZ: They've done a pretty good job in practice, particularly the two that we mentioned at the start. Not what they do in the game because they haven't played a lot in the game. Adam hasn't played a lot and Paki has played on special teams, Jeff hasn't played at all, and obviously last time Brandon Wegher played it was a little different-looking place, so it's going to be different for him, too. We just have to bring them along. We've had young players do well, too. We're going to try not to put anybody out there before they're ready to play.

But that being said, we're still going to have some ups and downs and we'll just try to work through it.

Q. Did Adam come to you guys a little bit late in the recruiting process?

COACH FERENTZ: He certainly did. It's an interesting study, going back to Mike's question. He came a little bit late. Julian came a little bit late, and I could name a couple other guys that came a little bit late that ended up being -- whoa, these guys are pretty good, boy, we blew that one. Certainly we should have had Julian -- he ended up coming to camp our initial time to gray shirt him.

Again, that's the science of recruiting. You're never 100 percent right and what have you, but Adam fits into that category. He's really impressed us. He's got a little edge to him that I think is going to serve him well out there on the field.

Q. How has the placekicker battle figured itself out, and will you play both of them on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll see how that goes. But the good news is it's really been the opposite -- up until Sunday it's been the opposite of the spring. Spring was pretty underwhelming, and they've both really performed well this camp, so that's a good thing.

Q. If Paki is your starting running back, which he is on your depth chart, will he return kicks or will you look for somebody else to do that?

COACH FERENTZ: If we were playing tomorrow, which we're getting close to that point, he'll be back there on the kick return team. That's our plan right now is to have him back there to answer the question. Yeah, we'll let him do both.

Q. After Tony and Allen, who do look for for tight ends?

COACH FERENTZ: Brad Herman is a guy that was -- if I was comparing Brad, it's kind of like Allen was a year ago as far as where he's at.

I mentioned a while back, and things haven't changed there, that a couple guys that have really surfaced. Reisner has really had a good preseason. It's just a shame we had to play him. I'm violating something I said earlier where we wouldn't throw a guy out there before he's ready. We did two years ago. We're guilty of that in 2007 for throwing Al Reisner out there. He did a really nice job considering the circumstances. But that was kind of a desperation move. Right now he looks like a Big Ten tight end. He really had a good camp, really impressive.

Q. They have four freshmen in their defensive backfield. Is that something you guys think you can be able to exploit on Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, they're young. They're definitely young. We plan on running, we plan on throwing. So they'll dictate a lot of what happens, I think. I'm not sure what to expect from that standpoint. It's typical of any first game, you're not quite sure. I don't expect wholesale changes with the way they do things because they've been very, very successful on defense. When you watch them on film, they are what they are, they

know who they are, and they're very well coached in what they do. So I can't imagine they would depart totally. You just don't know how much blitz and pressure you're going to get, those types of things.

We're going to try to be balanced like we always are and try to adjust during the game.

Q. How has Ricky's role changed in light of the running back situation and them being so young in the secondary?

COACH FERENTZ: Not greatly. We expect him to play quarterback and play well, and he's important in the running game as far as making sure we're not doing dumb things out there. Hopefully he'll be a proficient passer. That's what our hopes are for him for the whole season. He had a good camp and I think he's a little more confident than he was last year at this time, so that's a good thing.

Q. What kind of camp did Derrell have?

COACH FERENTZ: When he was out there, good. We had a lot of guys missing time. But when he was out there, he was practicing well.

Q. Has he missed a lot of time?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, I'm a coach, so if it's like three days that's significant as far as I'm concerned. Players probably look at it differently, but he's been in and out a little bit.

Q. Ballard moving down, can you talk about what it takes for a player to do that mentally and physically?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, it's really different. I've always felt like it's the same on offense. When you play inside, there's just an awful lot of traffic, there's an interior offensive lineman or a defensive lineman. There's traffic, you've got things happening from all sides and things like that. So the filtering process is a little bit different. When you're out on the edges your perspective is certainly a little bit more limited. And it's a little bit down and dirty in there, too, so you always wonder about how a guy is going to handle that.

That's been one of the pleasant surprises, I think, of this camp. He jumped down there a little bit in the spring, I talked about that, and that was kind of just filling some time. But I think he's looked pretty good in there, so that's good. It gives us some flexibility. He can still play outside. We're very pleased with the way Broderick Binns has

come on and equally happy about the way Mike Daniels has worked. He's done a nice job, too.

We're going to need six or seven guys, and it just gives us a little more flexibility that way.

Q. I'm sure you've heard of the allegations in the Michigan program made by anonymous players. I'm not going to ask you to comment on that directly, but how hard is it to keep within those limits of time you have with the players on Sundays and during the week? Do you follow that to the tee? How do you do that? What are your thoughts on the whole deal?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're probably like most people. We have compliance folks that keep an eye on things. The rules are pretty cut and dry. You've got 20 hours in season, you've got eight out of season, and there's certainly some things you can't do. But I think we have a pretty set routine. It's not real dramatic, and probably the biggest decision you have to make in season is do you work -- what day do you choose to give the players off.

In a perfect world I'd love to come in and just watch the film on Sunday and get rid of the players and then have a light practice on Monday night. But if you did that, there goes your day off, so you can't do that. So we made the selection, we work on Sundays. I'm a big believer in getting our tapes done, good, bad or indifferent, putting the game behind us and then moving on. Our option is to give our players off on Monday. That's what we do, and it's worked out just fine. But it would be nice to give them some football Monday evening.

But that being said, I think it's really healthy for the players to be away from us for a day. It's probably good for us to be away from them, it's probably good for everybody. That's just how we do it. It's not real dramatic.

Q. Is it difficult to stay within those limits?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. Yeah, I don't think so, not if you're working five days a week, no, not really, or six days a week if you count the games, which they do.

Q. Because I think there are a lot of people out there who hear this Michigan story and say, wow, everybody probably does it.

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. I did hear a quote from -- oh, boy, a quarterback you guys probably know more than I do. Yeah, Henne. The players, they spend more than 20 hours. That would be -- our good players, especially our older guys, you'd have to ask them, but they spend a lot of time on tape during the week on their own. Quarterbacks are way at the other end. They'd be the extreme.

But I think good players understand the value of preparation, watching tape, that type of thing, and it's really critical to a performance if a guy wants to really play fast and play well. They understand that. So that's part of the deal.

Q. One of the new names on your two deeps is Joe Conklin. Has he done something to jump up there, or is it more a matter of attrition?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, Joe is an interesting guy. He transferred here a couple years ago, and he was obviously ineligible when he transferred, but he was always the first guy in the room for special teams meetings even though he wasn't on any special teams, but that's just how Joe is. I mean, he was in here from day one. He's kind of a gym rat type guy on the football field.

Great story, tough as heck, and he's just kind of emerged. He's gotten better and better every step of the way, he's got a great attitude. Talk about a guy who loves football.

He'd be a great guy to ask how much film he watches. He probably watches way too much. He's really done a good job, and we're hopeful he'll be a good special teams player for us, too. People have asked who's going to be a Jayme Murphy, Joe maybe a candidate. He might be that kind of player.

Q. Another great player is Wayne Leppert. What do you see as his role this year?

COACH FERENTZ: He's been a valuable blocker for us. That's what our fullbacks do. Wade got off to a good start last year as a young guy and he's still a couple years to go. If both guys are healthy, we've got a good one-two punch in Brett Morse and Wade.

Q. Marvin McNutt, it seems that he's taken well to the conversion to wide receiver. What has he done there and what does he kind of offer?

COACH FERENTZ: He's done well, and I've mentioned this before, he made the change

last year, and when you change a position during the season, it's really tough to get the repetition you need to really learn. He made a lot of progress in the spring with that work in 15 days, and certainly the last 24, 25 practices have been great for him. So he's continued to ascend.

Probably the biggest adjustment for him outside of the technique was all the running. He wasn't used to that being a spoiled quarterback. But he's got size, he's got very good hands. I think he's developing a knack of how to be a good route runner. It's moving forward for him. He's not there yet, but it's moving forward for him.

Q. Place kicking, are you satisfied with that?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I think both those guys have really done well this month, and we'll go with it. We'll see what happens Saturday. Trent has got an opportunity to red shirt, but that's not like prominent in our thoughts.

I didn't finish that thought earlier. We'll try to be smart about that, but we want to win this year, so we're going to play the best guy given the situation. That's going to be our attitude going in.

Q. Do you expect Jewel Hampton to red shirt?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, clearly he will. He clearly will. He won't be able to play this year. The good news is he should be up and running and full speed I would think by the summer, if not sooner. But I don't foresee him practicing in the spring.

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