

October 13, 2007



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: We're certainly thrilled to get the victory, especially pleased for our players. You know, all credit to Illinois. It was a tough game all the way through. We knew that it would be, and we're just very, very pleased for our players.

Two groups I'd just like to acknowledge, our fans, they were outstanding, and we knew that they would be. But we also understand we have to give them something to get excited about, and it was great to get them into the game.

And I can't say enough about our seniors, too. I've been saying that all along. It's been a tough period for our football team certainly, and we're just getting tremendous leadership from guys that are very visible, very prominent, but I think the whole group, certainly Humpal on defense; and we were a little shorthanded with Mike being out, Klinkenborg; Albert Young has been doing a great job. Meetings, practice and the weight room, those guys are working hard. That's a big part of it.

I think we improved during the course of the week. It seemed that way at practice, and you just hope at some point that's going to translate out there on the field.

That being said, obviously we're hardly a finished product. We moved the ball today. The next step is hopefully score some points. But it was a very positive step. I think our guys can feel good about things.

Q. Did you open it up a little more today?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, a little bit, and I think first of all we avoided as many bad situations as we seemed to be -- we've been very adept at getting into some tough situations to get out of. I thought we threw the ball and caught it better and having just the basics. We threw and caught and our protection was a little bit better. I thought Jake

did a great job of not only managing the game but also executing back there.

Q. He had good protection?

COACH FERENTZ: He really did for the most part. We broke down a couple times, but things all kind of go together, and today at least we took a positive step.

Q. That play Myers was really open, is that something you guys have worked on on defense?

COACH FERENTZ: Just a play I think we've run, a lot of people have run, and if you call it at the right time you have a shot. Ken O'Keefe made a great call with the play, and I know it's been all the way through the route, but I'm sure he set it up well. A big part of that is not rushing, and Brandon has got a pretty good feel to the passing game, so that was obviously a great sight for all of us to see that thing.

Q. You ran for 4th down twice in the first quarter. What was the thinking behind that?

COACH FERENTZ: We felt like we needed some points and we were probably a little further than we were probably comfortable with at that point for a field goal. You hope the gods are with you, but we needed to score some points, too. I guess I can still say that after this game -- what did we get, 10? We got enough. They were down six at the end there. They needed a touchdown. I don't even know what the score was. I know they needed more than three. We just wanted to try to be aggressive and keep something going.

Q. Going for those two 4th downs you think paid off for you?

COACH FERENTZ: Hopefully. It kept drives going and kept us on the field, which is a good thing. We've had a hard time doing that. You know, you could argue it either way. You'd like to get the points any time you can, but we felt it was our best bet at that point.

Q. You took a penalty that you might not take under other circumstances.

COACH FERENTZ: That helped us out, gave us a shot. That's a risk. I won't second-guess what they did. I certainly understand their motives, and that was a huge play for us coming back and executing on that thing.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: No, not totally. I think they were probably playing for better field position, pick up ten extra yards. It's not like we're an offensive juggernaut right now so I can certainly see what they were thinking, so it was a great play. Those are the kind of plays you're going to have to make if you're going to win football games, so it was a positive step for us.

Q. Talk about Illinois defense down on the 2 yard line right at the start of the third quarter.

COACH FERENTZ: That was huge, and to push them back a little bit and get them maybe out of their mode of operation was great to see. Great to see.

Q. The interception at the end of the game, what kind of coverage did you have? Did you get a good look at that play?

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't. We were playing zone back there. Apparently he was in the right spot at the right time and it was great to see.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: It does. Just the way we're built, we need to do both if we're going to have success. To get that generated a little bit early does help us certainly. I just thought we got into a flow. Again, we couldn't finish drives, but at least we were driving, which is a huge positive. That was a good thing, and I thought our special teams improved. Up until that last punt, I thought we played pretty well on special teams today, which was great to see.

Q. The players indicated that there was almost no talk about the losing streak coming into this. Did you just purposely not talk about that?

COACH FERENTZ: I just don't know what good it would do. I think you hear enough about it, read enough about it, and our focus has been forward, strictly been forward. You know, we've been through tough periods. Nobody knows that better than the players. You know, they're the guys that have to go out on campus every day. We're on a submarine as coaches so we're pretty protected, but they're out on campus. They've got

family, friends, everybody is offering opinions and those types of things. No sense talking about it.

And the big thing, I think, our attitude has been good all the way through this thing, going back to January. We haven't been good enough at times, that's been pretty obvious, as a football team. But we've just been trying to focus on improving and certainly I hope that shows up.

Q. Do you feel like the breaks are going back in your favor a little bit more than they have?

COACH FERENTZ: Certainly we caught a break on the double cut at the end there. Fourth quarter I think things went our way a little bit. I've never been a big one on -- the ball can roll downhill or uphill, and when you're struggling, things tend to go against you. You just have to try to generate energy, play hard and hope things go your way sometimes. There's no magic to it, you just keep playing.

Q. Were you surprised on how much emotion there was on the field after the game by the fans and players?

COACH FERENTZ: Not at all. I didn't see what the players did necessarily. I saw the fans rushing out. Our fans, you know, they like to win, too. All of us do. It's good. It's great to walk into the locker room and see guys happy. That's what they work so hard for. You know, you're working just as hard when you're losing as you are when you're winning. In fact, a lot of times you're working harder, which is probably the wrong thing, but it's just human nature, I think. Sometimes the best thing is just to pull off a little bit.

But nonetheless, mentally you're grinding, you're pushing, that's what happens. And our fans are the same way. Our fans are invested. They've been outstanding all the way through this thing.

Q. Talk about Mike Humpal stepping up and how positive that was.

COACH FERENTZ: Mike has really been playing well. I don't know if he's compensating for his sidekick being out a little bit, but he's been playing well all the way through. He's just a quality senior. We knew coming into the season that we had a good defensive ball club. It hasn't always shown up at times because I think we've had them out there too long. So today was one of those days where we got some balance in the game as far as, you know, offense and defense, and that's going to help your performance. Norm and the guys came up with a great plan for their offense,

which is a different type of offense, but most importantly the players executed. They're the guys that get it done.

Again, we're getting great leadership with Humpal. Some of those guys, they're not all seniors up front, Mattison and Iwebema are, but King and Kroul might as well be, they're out there working, too. Harold Dalton is a senior, Shada and Godfrey, so they're all pushing things through.

Q. The penalty on the double cut, is that something you could see from the sideline?

COACH FERENTZ: It was an illegal formation. They covered up a guy obviously and he went out on the route.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, to us. So maybe that's a swing. I hadn't thought about that.

Q. Would you guys have been yelling about that?

COACH FERENTZ: I remember one in 2003 against a prominent opponent, and geez, it just kind of got -- we all saw it and it didn't matter. I don't know what would have happened.

Q. Was there a moment, though, when they connect on that play that you just kind of sit back and go, oh, here we go again, they're going against us again?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not that emotion. At that point you just -- we're going to get the ball back and try to do something with it. That put us down, what, three at that point, right? You just play the next play and go move on to the next one. But I'm glad it didn't work out. I liked the second decision better.

Q. All the guys seem to be playing with an extra bit of aggressiveness and energy. Can you talk about Albert Young in particular? He was pretty demonstrative today.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, I mentioned all the seniors, and Humpal and Mattison and those guys on the defensive side -- Albert has just been working so hard. I think he's reflective of the team because it hasn't been going real well for him obviously. The yards have been tough. Last week there weren't many seams out there, if any, after the first series it seemed like.

Yet as tough as it gets, he's been extremely positive. The guy is a proven player. He knows that. He's confident. And he's been working on encouraging the other guys.

Things can go two ways when it gets tough. Quality people, they do the right thing, and he certainly fits that bill. He's a tremendous young guy. And to have a good football team you have to have people like that here. Dallas was here with us this weekend, Dallas Clark, just talking during our talk outside. You listen to Dallas Clark talk yesterday, and boy, that's -- all that's right about football, sports, all those things, that's what makes it so worthwhile. I'm just naming one guy who happens to be a name everybody knows, but you're talking about a lot of guys, Will Lack, who's over here in the -- whatever it is you do when you graduate, medical school, you become a fellow or whatever. He's not quite an official doctor. We've had a lot of great guys come through this program, and that's what makes it worthwhile.

Q. He wasn't the one that recommended the touchdown play, though, right?

COACH FERENTZ: No, but he approved it. He likes it when the tight ends get the ball. So does my wife.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: (Laughing) that's how some things are. It's a good play.

Q. Were you surprised they had McGee out there instead of Williams?

COACH FERENTZ: No, they've been rotating through. He's a good football player, very dangerous football player. We have great respect for both those guys, and they've complemented each other well, so it didn't shock us at all. He almost got them there. He's a dangerous player.

Q. When the line went back and Doering got more playing time on the offensive line, do you think that made somewhat of a difference?

COACH FERENTZ: It didn't seem to hurt. I thought both those guys stepped in. We've got a lot of young guys stepping in all over the place, but Dan is a guy that's improved I think weekly since last spring, and he's continued that through the fall. It's a little tougher to evaluate guys once you get into the season. And Bryan is a guy who had a great camp and our plan was to play him and he knocked the shoulder out, whenever it was, the Tuesday after our first ballgame. So that put about a month derailment on that plan. But it was good to get him out there. We'll see how the film looks, but I don't think he hurt us. He's got a good

attitude.

Q. Last week you kind of talked about Greenwood and how he made a few plays. He seems like a very smart kid out there. Can you talk about his development?

COACH FERENTZ: It's great to see. Unfortunately right before the pick you saw him miss a tackle which gave Benn a couple extra yards. But you take the good with the bad. He works extremely hard, and I think he's our kind of football player. He's a great preparation guy, pretty smart back there. He's a tough kid. Our feeling is he'll just keep getting better. He's going to keep improving.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: It was huge, especially at that time. Getting the 1st down afterward was almost as good. Not quite as good but almost as good.

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