

November 23, 2012



Nebraska – 13
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An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just want to say I appreciate the fans. They've been great all season long. They've been great since '99 actually, and further back than that. They've been great all season. Appreciate their turnout.

I also want to thank our seniors, the 19 guys that were recognized before the game, just for all the things that they've done, being great team members, just doing a good job in all areas. Got a lot of respect for those guys certainly and wish them all the best moving forward.

Everybody here was at the ballgame. I thought it was a really hard-fought game by both teams. They did the better job in the second half. Congratulate them and wish them well moving forward.

That's kind of where it's at right now.

Q. How tough was it down there with the wind, the temperature?

COACH FERENTZ: The wind especially. Wind is the biggest factor I think in football typically. Probably comparable to the 2004 game over at Illinois as far as pretty much all the action went one way. Penn State '08, it was similar.

I think this was a little more significant. That's where all the scoring was going to take place. That's a big, big factor. They did a better job of it in the second half than we did.

Q. You weren't able to take momentum of the turnovers?

COACH FERENTZ: That's a factor. They've really had a great season, but they have turned the ball over. We were hoping to be opportunistic that way.

We had an opportunity twice, on the punt and another time. In a game like this, you would hope it would change field position dramatically or better yet come out with points. Not getting the field goal, that didn't help us before the half.

But, you know, overall they just did the better job than we did in the second half.

Q. Another opportunity was when the punt rolled dead inside the one?

COACH FERENTZ: Exactly. That happened to us earlier this season, too. You're hoping obviously at that point you can get the stop and get the ball inside the 50, which they had done earlier in the half.

Again, they've got a lot of good football players on the team. I don't know if they had one more valuable than Burkhead. He was a big part of that drive, tremendous football player. They've got a lot of good players, but to me he does something special for them.

Q. How much did the dynamic change when he entered the game?

COACH FERENTZ: As I said, in my mind he's really a dynamic player. He just changes the tempo of things out there a little bit. That's what good players do.

Again, they've got a lot of good players. To me, when he's in there, they run at a little different level. I'm not taking anything away from No. 8. He's a good back, too. We had a hard time tackling him. That was a factor.

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Q. Was there ever a point in the summer or fall camp when you thought this team would not go to a bowl game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes and no. The yes part is that I've got a great appreciation for winning, always have. I'm not sure everybody always does, including players. It's something you have to educate them on, just how hard it is to win a game.

I heard Jim Leyland say that on the radio, a week before the World Series. Winning a baseball game is hard, and they've got 162 of them.

I think anybody that's competed learns to appreciate the fact that wins are hard to come by. But I'll flip it around, too, and say our expectations are certainly to go to bowls every year, but realize they're never automatic. This year is certainly evidence of that.

That's behind us now as of about a half hour ago. Now we go back to work and see what we can do about moving forward in a positive way.

Q. Do you have a level of concern about the progress of your program?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't. Nobody's happy about where we're at today, obviously. Big picture-wise, no. Nobody is happy about today or this season.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about James (Vandenberg) wrapping up his career, really representing the program well in a lot of ways. I know you have a special relationship.

COACH FERENTZ: Unbelievably well. You know, not to get too philosophical, but maybe it's a life lesson. Good things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Bad things happen to good people, too.

This didn't pan out certainly the way James would have hoped. None of our seniors wanted to go out being part of a 4-8 team certainly. But it can happen. It did happen.

I think the world of James as a football player; more so as a person. Just a tremendous young person. Obviously a good student, too. But he's a model guy. He's the type of guy you'd like to have lead your football team. Sorry we couldn't support him and help him a little bit more this season, but that's the way it worked out. He did a great job dealing with tough circumstances.

There were times certainly where he could have played better, like everybody, and I could have coached better. We all have ownership. But

we'll all be hard-pressed to find better people than James Vandenberg coming through our program.

Q. What gives you confidence there are better days coming for this program?

COACH FERENTZ: Our players. Start with that. We've got some good players on our football team. There's no reason we can't be successful. We fully realize we have a lot of work to do right now.

Q. What was the moment like when James (Ferentz) came to give you a hug?

COACH FERENTZ: It's a tough one emotionally. It's the second time I've had that experience. It's a bittersweet experience. It's wonderful on one hand, but it's hard say good-bye. It's hard to say good-bye to all the 19 seniors.

I've been fortunate to have two of our children involved in that mix over the last 14 years. It's hard to say good-bye to him, but I'm appreciative of all the great things we've been able to experience together.

Q. Do you think this was a positive week in terms of practice and the effort you played with today?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, the week went well. The guys handled the week well. It's a little unusual because you're not in class. They could get distracted. Certainly coming off a tough loss, you never know how a team is going to react there.

The guys practiced with good focus, practiced hard. We competed hard today. We weren't good enough to beat Nebraska today, but we competed hard enough to beat 'em.

That's where it all starts. If you don't compete, if you don't fight on the field, it's going to be hard to win football games.

So, you know, that part of it, I thought our guys did a really good job with.

Q. Are you comfortable with this coaching staff as it is going into the future?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'm comfortable with everything right now. With that being said, I need to take some time and look at everything, starting with my performance, going right down to the bottom. We'll do that like we do every year. We have good coaches, good people.

There were a lot of things that went into being 4-8 this year. That's the objective now in the

weeks ahead, is to figure out what could we have done better, what do we need to change, going from there.

Q. Greg Davis give every indication he'll come back next year?

COACH FERENTZ: Up until about eight minutes ago I heard nothing about that, then someone said there was something out there that was floating around in cyberspace or something like that. That's the first I've heard of that.

Q. Passing game, a lot of dynamics to the blocking, the route. The two variables of last year's performance, this year's performance, lack of Marvin McNutt, new offensive coordinator. Were there more variables to the performance?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I'd say so. I think the running game affects it. Something early set in on me this past week, when you prepare for an opponent, we intermix clips from a year ago. Our guys blocked pretty well up front last year. In this ballgame, you start thinking about it, you have Riley Reiff at right tackle, Zusevics at right tackle who just got activated, Gettis at right guard. James was a two-year veteran at that point, and Tobin was just starting to play well at left guard.

There's a lot of things that go into execution and production. I'm not saying we couldn't do better, the receiver/quarterback part of things. But there's a lot of things that go into being a good offensive football team. There were several games this year when I thought we were in sync and I thought that's where we want to be, to operate. But the challenge is going to get there moving forward. That's the work that's ahead of us.

I just think it's a lot more complex than one guy, one person, one group typically.

Q. Did you think of going on fourth-and-three?

COACH FERENTZ: I think on that one it wasn't that late, was it? Six minutes, seven minutes. There's a lot of time. The idea there is to get the ball down inside the 20, let them punt into the wind. That wasn't too tough. You get down inside four minutes, I think we're looking at a whole different world there.

Q. With no bowl coming up, what fills that gap in your schedule and the program's?

COACH FERENTZ: The way we train. The next coming weeks will be different. We're not going to be practicing, so it's more of an off-season training. The biggest void will be the time after finals until the 1st of January. Typically we'd be working as a football team, be together as a team practicing football, but also being together, which is a great thing. That will be different.

As a staff, we'll have nothing to do but focus on recruiting, player development, program development, whereas typically in December you're trying to get a game plan in as well. Some of those other things, they take a backseat.

Q. What about the quarterback position next year?

COACH FERENTZ: One thing for sure, whoever wins the job will be inexperienced. We think we have three guys on campus that all have the potential to be good players. Now the competition begins. It's already started, I mean, in some regards.

James is out of the equation now. We'll move forward. Really have till next August to figure this out. I think it's a good group of guys. We'll see how the race goes.

Q. Would it have been an advantage for one of them to have played?

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's really overrated personally, if it's 'garbage time'. Any experience is good. But to say it was going to determine the fate of the our season next year, I don't believe we probably would have taken those steps. I think there are a lot of things that are going to happen between now and then that will be more important.

Q. What is your biggest concern about the state of the program today?

COACH FERENTZ: 4-8, not much joy there. You've got to go back to 2000 to be in that situation. So that's not much fun. We've been there before.

We'll have a press conference later in the week coming up. Maybe I'll feel differently then. Still the low point of my tenure here would have been the second part of the '06 season. To me that was a low point. That may surprise you, it may not. I've said that before and I'll stick with

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that. Maybe I'll feel differently at the end of this week, but currently that's how I feel.

Q. In 2007 you missed a bowl, and the next year you were as good as anybody in the Big Ten.

COACH FERENTZ: It's early to say, but time will tell. I know that's possible, but time will tell.

Q. Do you feel there are any true freshmen that if you might have taken the redshirts out would have been able to contribute this year?

COACH FERENTZ: Ward practiced a lot with our second group. We're optimistic about him. I think it would have best served him to redshirt him this year. Canzeri is in the same boat. He's not a freshman. With the knee, the comeback, all that, it worked out best for him, too.

There's some guys in there, they may have been able to help. But I think typically the guys that weren't playing, it was probably best for them. Hopefully it will benefit them moving forward.

Q. Micah Hyde, so many different areas, just talk about his career.

COACH FERENTZ: The things he's done on the field are pretty obvious for everybody to see, playing defense, great job on special teams. Everybody knows he's a good returner. Did a nice job today; he gave us an opportunity there. Not as visible. I think people probably noticed the way he covered on punts. He's basically been doing that his whole career. That's an art, it's a skill. It takes a great attitude to do that.

You get him away from the field, just a tremendous young guy. He had a bump in the road here awhile back. I made a point at that point, just an outstanding person.

I talked about James a little while ago. I'd flip it over and say the same thing about Micah. When a career is over, the wins and losses come and go, if you stand it long enough, it's just how it works.

But he's the kind of guy that you want, first of all, leading your program. But when they leave, really be proud they went to this university and played in this program. Those guys both really epitomize what we're looking for.

Q. Your second son on a senior day easier than your first?

COACH FERENTZ: No. He's probably a little bit more emotional than the first one. He came out and he was welled up. That didn't help anything at all.

So, no. Just like not going to a bowl is not any easier. It doesn't get easy, so...

Thank you.

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