

December 27, 2010



An interview with:

IOWA COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just want to, again, express our appreciation for, first of all, being invited to this game. The Insight Bowl has just been tremendous to us all week here. And we've had great -- enjoyed great hospitality. The area has been fantastic. But, most of all, the people involved in the Bowl have been outstanding.

We had heard about that coming down here through the years, and certainly we can attest to the hospitality that's been extended. It has been first class. We are very appreciative of that.

Secondly, we have a great challenge on our hands playing tomorrow night against an outstanding Missouri team. We have had great preparation. The guys have worked hard. I imagine both teams right now are probably at that point where they are just eager to play, and I know we certainly are.

It has been a great week. Appreciate everything that's been done for us, and hopefully it will be a great game tomorrow night.

Q. A lot's been made that these teams haven't played in 100 years and that's mostly Missouri's fault because they backed out. Do you foresee in the next five or ten years that Iowa and Missouri could play nonconference, or is that affected by the new structure of the Big Ten, the new structure of the Big 12?

COACH FERENTZ: My guess is -- I'm just taking a guess. The likelihood of that has probably diminished now at the expansion of the conference. I don't know this, but I wouldn't be surprised if we end up playing nine conference

games somewhere near in the future, which would affect the way things proceed here on out.

The other part is that we're locked in with Iowa State with an annual ball game, too. So I think that really kind of minimizes things on top of it.

Q. Is everyone eligible and ready for the Bowl?

COACH FERENTZ: As far as I know, yeah (smiling).

What time is it right now? 11:00. As far as I know. I think our final grades do come out today -- or tomorrow. That would be interesting, huh?

Q. How confident are you in Marcus Coker to carry the load for you guys tomorrow night?

COACH FERENTZ: Marcus has played well this year. The only drawback with Marcus is he got injured third practice, fourth practice of the season. But that certainly deterred his progress. He has been playing catchup since the time he returned. But I think he has really done a great job with his opportunities. We're all confident that he'll play well.

Q. Missouri finished their season with three straight wins. You guys finished with three straight losses. But it has been four weeks since either one of you have played. Does the momentum from November carry over to December?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope not. I guess that's three words, right? I can't speak for them. But for us, we've tried to put it behind us. And we've treated this month as a separate entity. And I think the guys have done a good job with each phase of the month, and there are phases during the course of December, certainly.

So we've had a good week now, and the guys have done a good job in all regards. And hopefully we'll show up tomorrow. But there are no

guarantees certainly.

Q. With those three losses, has it caused you to make any kind of changes in preparation, things that you are looking for and those kinds of things?

COACH FERENTZ: Not really. We won't be any different offensively or defensively in terms of our schemes, special teams.

The biggest thing is we have to play better. We have to execute better, and we have to finish ball games. That's something that we've struggled to do this year. That's documented, well documented. The difference between winning seven games in the regular season and ten, which we did a year ago, is how you finish. And we didn't close out games as successfully this year.

So our objective tomorrow is, first of all, to be in that position in the fourth quarter. And then we certainly need to do a better job in that fourth quarter. It won't be easy. Missouri has done a great job, most notably in the Oklahoma game. They dominated the fourth quarter there. So we will have to be at our best.

Q. What impresses you most about the Missouri defense?

COACH FERENTZ: First thing that jumps into my mind is just their athleticism, speed and athleticism. They are very aggressive with their scheme, which makes sense based on the way they're built. They are a very athletic group. Probably the most athletic group we have seen. I'm talking about all 11 guys, not just a couple guys here and there.

They are really a speed-oriented group. They rush the pass extremely well. They do a good job in coverage and they can take some chances because they have good guys in the back end, and their linebackers are extremely versatile and fluid.

I compare them a little bit -- they are a different style of defense than Ohio State, but they are like Ohio State. And it is really hard to get clean plays. It is hard to keep things open for long. They really close it down quick and do a great job of keeping you out of the end zone. It will really be a challenge for our offensive football team.

Q. Did you envision Marcus being the -- it seems like his strength is moving piles, 230-pounder. Do you envision that as a true freshman?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, we have already had a chance. We were really excited about him when we recruited him. I think he is probably a good example of the kind of player that we hope to get in our program. He committed to us really before he became -- how should I say it? We didn't have to beat the world to get him when he committed to us, and then I think as a senior maybe he played a little bit better than that. He stayed with his commitment. And we were really thrilled about that.

We thought he had a chance to be a real good back, and I had a very bad vibe when he got injured that third day of camp just because we thought he would be part of our plan this year. We intended to play him and utilize him, and certainly losing that six or seven weeks, whatever we lost, set him back a little bit.

But we think he can be a real quality back for us, and we're excited about his future.

Q. You said when this matchup was made that it was going to be a photo finish. Has anything changed?

COACH FERENTZ: I hope it has. No, I mean, it should be a great game. We got a great challenge on our hands certainly. Talked about their defense a little bit. You know, they're very much a challenge for us offensively with their system. It starts with the quarterback. Gabbert does a great job of throwing the football. They have a lot of great players offensively and the offensive line group that allows them to execute. They have got very good, skilled players.

We will have our hands full and they are good on special teams. They are a top-notch ball club. There is no surprise to me that they have won ten games. Probably could have won a couple more, too. They are just that kind of team.

Q. What's the mood of this team been like? Obviously the way the season ended wasn't what everybody wanted, and then the off-the-field incidents that you dealt with a couple weeks ago. Have the guys -- do you feel like they have rallied, they bought in, they're distracted? What's the mind-set?

COACH FERENTZ: We will know more tomorrow. My sense is the month has gone very well. Guys have practiced well. There are usually not a lot of smiles in early December when you are practicing. It is not the most fun time to be

practicing football. But I think the attitude has been great, and they have done a tremendous job down here.

We had one guy five minutes late for a curfew about four or five nights ago, and that's the only hiccup I'm aware of thus far. That tells me the guys are on task and they have practiced well. That's all we can ask.

Q. On Sunday Colin was talking about how the receiving core, like in the practices he's had here over the past month, they have been working on lining up in different spots, some of the guys that would line up outside working inside and vice versa. Have you been pleased with the progress you have seen from those guys over the past month, especially now that you don't have Derrell with you for this game?

COACH FERENTZ: I think, first of all, it is pretty much true in any season. Hopefully you are bigger than any one player on your team.

We've got a lot of guys. Colin played extremely well, as I pointed out, in the Orange Bowl last year and did a great job. Our guys have to be versatile. That's what we like them to do, and they have done a good job with that. I think we will be ready to go. We will be fine there.

They have practiced well, and the receivers included. They've done a good job.

Q. Mike Meyer got thrown in the kicking game this year, showed moments where he looked like he had ice water in his veins and other moments where you scratched your head. That was a big position you needed to fill coming into the season. He has had a month off to sit back and look at what he's done and see what he needs to fix. What have you seen now in the past month?

COACH FERENTZ: It's not fair to throw this out there, but I will. Nate Kaeding his first year had highs and lows. As a pro he has had some too. If I were a pro coach, and I am a college coach, if I was at either level, there was nobody more I would want to kick than Nate Kaeding.

Jason Baker I remember had some ups and downs in '99, and then 2000 had a great year. The things we have seen from Mike have been very, very positive. I think he has done a really good job. It wasn't our intention necessarily for him to win the field goal job, but he did. That's to his credit.

And I think his future is really good. He has handled it well. Seems to be very even keeled and doesn't look to be affected by a lot of things. He has had a couple of misses. All of us wish that didn't happen, mostly him. But that's part of being a kicker. And we're really confident he is the guy that's really going to grow in our program. We are really thrilled about his first year.

Q. Yesterday Tyler Sash and Marvin McNutt indicated they had filed their NFL advisory papers for the draft. Shaun Prater referred questions to you as to whether he did or didn't. Can you say one way or the other on him and then give your thoughts maybe on the readiness?

COACH FERENTZ: Maybe I should make it dramatic and wait before kickoff to announce that news, because I know the whole world is waiting to hear that one. I will share this with you. He did. I think it has really become a common practice for any junior that has played at all basically.

So it is a resource that the NFL has made available to players. I think that's wonderful. It is better for them to get information from people that do this for a living as opposed to people that might be advising or, you know, offering advice that really have no idea. So it is an advice resource for players. And we encourage it. We have no problem with it.

In the appropriate time, we'll deal with that. I imagine they have to get the feedback fairly quickly. I don't know when that date is. I have been thinking about some other things right now. It is a player's decision, and if a guy has a great opportunity, then they make that decision based on their situation.

Q. (Question off microphone)?

COACH FERENTZ: We'll let the committee do their work on that. I'm out of that business right now. I'm not a NFL personnel guy. Let's see what they say, and we'll go from there.

Q. Given the way you guys finished November, did you change anything with your Bowl preparation compared to seasons past?

COACH FERENTZ: No, not really. We -- just tried to do things better. That's really, I think, what caused us to come up short in November in a couple games. There's always -- you can go back to and look at, and we will do that in the out of

season certainly. We don't plan any dramatic changes.

Our goal is to play better and finish the game, play the entire 60 minutes.

Q. You mentioned multiple times that you don't want to evaluate a season until after it's over. Given the way this team has performed, what could a win over a ten-win team in a Bowl game do for the overall outlook for the season?

COACH FERENTZ: It is always positive. We have beaten some ranked teams through the years. And it is always a positive. I can't remember it ever being a bad thing. We had ten wins, it would still be great.

Any time you beat a really good football team -- any time you win period. Let me pull that one back. Any time you win, enjoy it, because wins are hard to come by in competitive leagues that we play in or like Missouri plays in.

Secondly, if you beat a team that is talented and well coached and has been as successful as Missouri, that's a real -- that's something you can really feel good about.

That's all we can focus on right now. We can't do a thing about the 12 games we've played this year. We couldn't last year. We were 10-2 at this time. We couldn't do anything about those two we lost or what have you. That's history. Other than you try to learn from those things and then you apply that to the next game.

In this case, we had a little more time to apply it. But our focus is strictly to play our best tomorrow night. Hopefully we'll win. It won't be easy, but hopefully we can win.

If we do, that would be a great accomplishment, and it would be a real tribute to our players.

Q. Do you think Nebraska knows what it is getting into?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think they have to worry about too much. They are a pretty good football team. You know, they are coming into a very competitive league, but they are leaving a very competitive league too. We have had a chance, as you might imagine, to watch a lot of tape over the past couple weeks. Awful lot of good football teams in the Big 12 as well.

I'm not big on ranking the BCS conferences, but we've had a chance to play SEC teams over the years and Big 12 exposure. We

see them every year with Iowa State, we play them on an annual basis, as I mentioned earlier.

So both great conferences. Pac-10 the same way. We played Arizona this year and had a chance to watch a lot of their film the last two years we played them.

So I think if you look at all the BCS conferences, you can argue which one is the strongest. There are a lot of good teams out there. A lot of people playing really good football. My guess is Nebraska would fare pretty well no matter where they landed. They are a pretty good outfit.

Q. Talk about Norm specifically, how he's feeling and how the desert is treating him out here.

COACH FERENTZ: You know, it has been a process, as I've said. And it has taken longer than any of us had hoped, especially Norm. But he's -- I think he has had a good month. It has been a hard month certainly because he's hardly full speed physically right now. But he's gaining ground. One of the -- it is just a cruel twist of fate, I guess.

But whatever they call it, a frozen shoulder, he has had that issue since the spring. That couldn't have come at a worse time, as you might imagine, to maneuver and get around. But it has been a long fall for him. The good news is he has been able to work a lot more extensively this month, and fortunately for us he has been able to stretch it out where he is not working 15 hours a day, one of those types of things.

We are making progress, and hopefully we can get through this game successfully and then give him a chance to really build back his strength and get into a more normal routine.

Q. Your seniors have built up an incredible résumé over the last four years, five years in the program and two Bowl victories. How important is a win based on some of the things that have happened this year and the expectations and those kind of things to get a win?

COACH FERENTZ: It would be a great way to send them off, that's for sure. You know, if there is one reason outside of just winning that's more enjoyable, if there is one good reason to win, that's the first one on my list. We have 25 guys that did a great job, graduated a week ago -- two weeks ago, whatever it was, the Saturday after

finals, and one last spring and seven more coming up here in the spring. They have done a great job in a lot of areas. They really have been a big part of three years of success. I think 27 wins now in three years.

It would really be a nice to send them off. If there was a special reason, that would be a great thing certainly.

Q. Can you just talk about how difficult it is to contain a guy like Blaine Gabbert?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you know, he's a challenge because he's an outstanding quarterback, throws the ball really well. And going back to the NFL point, I've read that if he would come out, he may be a top guy. I don't know. I'm not going to verify that or not. I just know this: He is an excellent college quarterback, and he's deceptively good running the football as well.

So they can hurt you a lot of different ways. They have really talented receivers. Their running backs are all over five a carry. That line does a good job. With that kind of offense, it starts with the quarterback. And the attacks are very -- this summer you have two quarterbacks that really have played at a high level this past season. Any time you win ten games, you know the quarterback play has been good, and it is certainly true with Gabbert. He is an outstanding player.

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