

August 30, 2011



An interview with:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome back. Just start out with our captains for this week. We'll have Mike Daniels, Marvin McNutt, Tyler Nielsen and James Vandenberg, just in alphabetical order. They'll lead the team out there on Saturday.

Injury-wise, I'll give you an update. A couple of guys won't participate. Carl Davis won't make the game this week. Hopefully next week he will. B.J. Lowery had an arm injury eight, ten days ago, somewhere in that ballpark. He's going to be out basically for this first month. I think we have a chance to get him back three weeks from now, somewhere in that ballpark. I think for the first four ballgames, realistically he'll be out. Nolan MacMillan continues to work back. Dakota Getz works back. Hopefully we'll see them back in the next two to four weeks.

The Brad Rogers situation really hasn't come to any resolution yet. I think we're making progress. We're going to take that week-to-week, day-to-day, see how that goes. He's fine. He's out of harm's way, doing fine there. We'll see how that progresses.

Just a couple words about Tennessee Tech. They're a veteran football team. I don't know if we've played a team that's more veteran. Twenty-one returning starters, that's not including their specialists. They're really veteran. I think they're a team that's really made strides. In all the things that you read out of their camp right now, they feel really good about their football team and I think rightfully so.

They've got some players on offense that really grab your attention, starting with their quarterback. Not the biggest guy in the world, but

an exciting performer, runs the ball well, throws it well.

On the offensive side, they've got an attack they're promoting right now, fantastic-paced, high-tempo. I think we'll see a lot of that this year, certainly in the first part of our schedule, no question about that.

Defensively they're very well-coached. You watch them on tape. They play with good pad level, work hard, tackle well, do all the little things right. They do the same thing on special teams.

I think all in all we're facing a real challenge.

If you look at how they finished last year, they beat Jacksonville State in their last ballgame. I think that sent them off like winning a bowl game, positive vibe. Jacksonville State is the team that beat Ole Miss in the opening game last year. I think we all know Virginia Tech got upset in their opener last year. You could say the same thing about us. We just escaped in '09 not playing the Orange Bowl that following January as well.

Whether you look at football or basketball, I remember the announcers mentioning that Butler lost to Youngstown, nine wins in basketball, Butler playing for the national championship. So every game is important. We need to treat it as such.

I think our players, as they've been watching the film, they've started that process. I think they've got great respect for Tennessee Tech. We'll have to be at our best on Saturday certainly.

That being said, we've got some experienced players that we're counting on to play very well. I think we're excited to see what's going to happen with some of the newcomers, guys we haven't seen play a significant amount of time.

The guys have worked hard over the last three weeks. I think the attitude is good. Our health is pretty good. Big thing now is for us to have a great week, our first game week certainly, see if we can't handle that well and most

importantly go out and play well on Saturday. That's kind of where we're at right now.

Q. What is the nature of Nolan and Dakota's injuries?

COACH FERENTZ: Same thing they've had. They're working back from where they were in the spring. I think they're both on schedule. Nolan is a little bit more gray area-ish if you will, the sports hernia thing. He's making progress right now. His demeanor is good. Hopefully he can continue to make progress weekly. I'm not going to say when he's going to be back, but hopefully sooner than later.

Q. Any true freshmen playing?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we've got anywhere from six to eight, maybe six to nine, that have been in the discussion. We'll let this week play out, see what happens.

I think probably the most obvious would be the runningback position, it's probably where we're the thinnest right now. We've been pleased with all three of the guys. They've done a nice job over the last three weeks, learning well. I think they've competed well in the situations we've put them in.

I think all three of them are capable of going out there. All three of them are capable of going the wrong way. That percentage is getting smaller with each day. But it's still there. That's part of playing young guys. But I think that's probably the most prominent part right now.

Q. Is Jason White number three right now?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we have great faith in Jason. I think he's improved. He's a good team leader, a good football player, pretty versatile, pretty dependable. I think he's improved his performance with every opportunity, too.

Q. Can you say who is the number two QB?

COACH FERENTZ: It's really close. James Vandenberg is clearly our number one. After that we have guys that haven't played. Not that James is a veteran player. Made that point earlier on the phone deal. You look at Vandenberg, you look at Coker. Neither one of those guys have played much, but we're counting on both to play well.

A.J. Derby, if we were playing tomorrow, he'll be the next man in. I expect it to be that way

Saturday. I think he's improved, too. Certainly he doesn't have any game experience.

Q. (Question regarding FB Matt Meyers.)

COACH FERENTZ: He's done a nice job. He's a young player a year ago who pretty much was a scout team player. Then with Brad's medical situation right now, it's opened the door for opportunity. I guess it was back at the end of this fall last year prior to the bowl we made the decision to make Jonathan Gimm, give him a full-time fullback with Brett Morris graduating. Matt has taken opportunity of that advantage as well. I think those guys are pretty even, we'll carve out a role for both of them. Matt is a guy with a great attitude. He's come in here, worked hard in every phase of the program. He's improved over the last three weeks.

Q. Do you anticipate an expanded rotation on the defensive front?

COACH FERENTZ: No question. That's something you can count on and bet on. I'll say 'count on' instead of 'bet on' right in this climate.

I think that's all year long. I would anticipate us being that way all season long. Certainly Mike Daniels and Broderick Binns are the two centerpieces of that group. We've seen them play excellent football. We're counting on them to do that. After that we've got a lot of guys that are working hard, improving. But I think we could really see a rotation develop. That's another position where you're going to see our guys perform Saturday. Got their work cut out for them.

Q. Watson Brown is the brother of Texas Coach Mac Brown. Will you go back and watch the tape when you played Texas in the Alamo Bowl?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably won't do us much good. He's certainly a veteran coach, Coach Brown is. Kind of like the football team: they've got an awful lot of experience, they know what they're doing. Sounds like they're having fun. Just reading between the lines, sounds like they're very optimistic that they've been working, building the program. If you watch the tape, you can really see that growth, you can see that development.

I think they have an opportunity, I would imagine they have a great opportunity in their conference. It's been interesting. Last December,

learned a lot about the Big 12, now learning more about their conference. There's a lot of football being played in that conference.

Q. How does a game like this get born? Somebody know somebody?

COACH FERENTZ: Not that I know of. But I will give you a quick story. Their athletic director, Mark Wilson, an outstanding guy. We actually sat in a canoe together. He kept me dry back in whatever year it would have been, '91 or '92. We used to go on a canoe trip every May. Veteran coach up there, member of the faculty, son is the AD up there now, would take us way out in the middle of nowhere. We would do some white water canoeing. Mark was an expert canoeist. Always made sure I had somebody to keep me dry. Mark is a great guy. Shouldn't call him young. Don't know how young he is anymore.

Q. Canoeing is right up John's (Campbell) alley?

COACH FERENTZ: We weren't talking about that in the canoe (laughter).

Q. How much time have you spent going over the new rules and procedures of the game?

COACH FERENTZ: A little bit obviously. I think the biggest thing right now, player safety remains a real important focus, and rightfully so. The other thing I think we just need to be very proactive coaching with the celebration stuff. There's a change in enforcement. It's basically a live-ball foul.

But the thing I'm concerned about is that rule maybe getting overofficiated a little bit. I don't know if it's politically correct. I flashback to the BYU/Washington game. It's really a subjective interpretation in terms of what is celebration. I think we have to try to coach on the side of being careful, encouraging our players to be really careful what they do in terms of what their reactions might be. They need to be spontaneous and in good taste certainly. If they're not sure, then don't do it. One of those deals.

Q. Have you been told how you can celebrate?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, well, it's just subjective. Again, I go back to the case in point. I think it was Locker that threw the ball in the Washington/BYU game. To me that looked pretty harmless. In that official's interpretation, it was an

excessive celebration. You just have to be careful. I think right now it's so prominent, the first couple weeks we just need to be careful about what we're doing.

Q. How did Davis progress through camp and give you confidence he can be the number two guy?

COACH FERENTZ: He's doing well. Last spring, the spring scrimmage, showed that he could be a potentially big-play guy. The next step for Keenan, a lot of guys that haven't played much, is to get out there and actually demonstrate that on the game field.

We had a little bit of a crowd here two and a half weeks ago, but certainly it will be different Saturday for our guys, not as many of their guys because they've played in front of big crowds. We have a lot of guys that haven't been out there. That's going to be our next step. Hopefully everybody takes a positive step forward.

Q. You have a lot of guys on the defensive line that have rotated. Is Saturday a test for them, to see which positions fits them better?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're pretty much settled in with most everybody. Dominic as a swing guy, he's got that ability. Karl Klug probably could have done it, but we had a need for him inside. It is a little bit like offensive linemen, some guys are all positions, some guys are more versatile and flexible than others and they can kind of fit into slots where other guys are better suited.

I think we're closer to finding where guys are best suited. Right now we feel like Steve's best home is on the outside, and Joe Gaglione has moved inside. Seems better there. Saturday will be the next step of the process for sure.

Q. Set on the left side of the offensive line?

COACH FERENTZ: Sure. I guess that means no, right. That would be a no (laughter).

Yeah, there's still some back and forth. Brandon Scherff missed some time in camp. Matt Tobin took advantage of that opportunity. Right now Matt will start the game. He's done a good job. Unless he blows up this week, which I don't expect him to do, he'll probably start the ballgame. We'll probably play both of them at some point.

Q. Can you talk about the return game decision, Mike and Jordan Bernstine on kickoff.

COACH FERENTZ: Mike has done a nice job. He's very dependable catching the football, good judgment. Probably some equation there with the free safety part of the deal. Hinkel was supposed to be at free safety. Was a great punt returner for us. Both former quarterbacks, good judgment. Marvin has done a nice job as well.

Then on the other side, Keenan worked some at that position last year. Jordan is enthusiastic and eager to do it. That's part of being a good kick returner, too. I'll single Jordan out. He's just had an exceptional camp of all the guys that have improved and shown major steps, we just talked about Matt, I'd single Jordan out, too, I think he's playing at a higher level than he has at any time. We're excited about that. Hopefully he can help us out on special teams as well.

Q. How do you feel about your special teams overall?

COACH FERENTZ: Glad you brought that up because that's a happy topic right now, at least the last couple weeks. It's been good. I don't want to jinx us. All three of the place kickers are really doing a pretty good job over the last couple weeks, pretty much all camp. Meyer has continued to improve. Trent has dipped. He really bounced back. He had a bad spring. Mike wasn't doing so great in the spring either. Both of them have done a really good job. Marshall Koehn has done a really good job for us. The good news with Trent and Mike doing well, we can redshirt Marshall. He certainly belongs here. He's right in the middle of those guys. He's competed well.

Eric Guthrie has done a good job. Casey Krieter has done well. If we can stay healthy, I think we'll have sufficient core guys to play on special teams. Our issues start when guys get nicked up a little bit and they can't be out there.

Q. Do you anticipate a lot of true freshmen playing?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we have three or four guys on defense right now that we're looking at that could enter into that core group. We don't see them necessarily in the two-deep or starting certainly. At the end of the week if we feel like they can really help us make a difference, we'll put them out there and let them get started.

Q. Is that a good way to get them game experience, rather than redshirting them?

COACH FERENTZ: That's the upside. They're performing, doing something at a high tempo, getting that experience. Hopefully the benefit is that they're helping our special teams. I think last year you saw some of the inconsistency, especially like our kick coverage last year. That's the downside of playing some young players. One week they'll do really well, then the next week they won't do so well. You get them back on track.

It's kind of funny, well it's not funny at all, but if you look at some of our losses, those were those down weeks. Every little thing counts. You look at the bowl game. We covered kicks like you're supposed to. They started inside the 20 quite a bit. Same guys, just the tempo they're going at. That's the biggest thing.

Q. Sometimes tentative on special teams.

COACH FERENTZ: That can happen. Yeah, that can happen. You have a bad play or whatever. Sometimes they have bad days. They just got to push forward.

Q. If Saturday goes the way you'd like it to, at one point would you like to take your starters out?

COACH FERENTZ: Two years ago we had a hard time getting anybody out, including our opponent. That's kind of the approach I'm taking right now. I think that's where we're at. We need to worry about playing well and trying to win the game. That's what we have to worry about. We'll worry about that other stuff if we get that opportunity. I'm just worried about winning the game right now.

Q. Will Derby play Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: Wish he could play a whole half. That could happen two ways. Hope it's the second way or the good way, however you want to put it. To go into a game plan for that, you know, I'll tell you what, we haven't beaten anybody yet, I know that.

Q. You seem to have had complete confidence in James Vandenberg from day one. Why is that?

COACH FERENTZ: I mean, we've been watching. I say 'we'. Coaches and players have

had the luxury of seeing things you haven't. Just watching everything he does, whether it be, you know, practice, the way he comes in the building, the way he trains, just everything he does. He has a way about him that really exudes confidence. I think that's why all of his teammates feel good about him.

When we have seen him in game competition, I think everybody would agree the way we saw him work through situations is pretty impressive.

You're never a hundred percent sure what's going to happen. I'm pretty sure he's going to have some ups and downs like every player on our roster. But at the end of the day, if experience tells you anything, I think he'll just perform just fine. He's on target. He's got good ability on top of it. That's a good thing, too. He doesn't weigh 160 pounds anymore. That helps.

Q. How has James Morris looked?

COACH FERENTZ: The biggest fear with him is him feeling like he has to be Larry Station, Greenway, Hodge, one of those guys. He just needs to play football. He's almost overly conscientious. He works extremely hard and try to be perfect. That's what good players tend to do.

He's done a nice job. Just needs to relax and just play football, be our middle linebacker, play football and do a good job. I think he'll do that.

Q. Vandenberg has been game ready. You're anxious for him, I imagine?

COACH FERENTZ: A year ago Nielsen got positioned behind a pretty good guy in A.J. Edds. When Tyler got his opportunity, he really played well. Same thing with James. In my mind a year ago was ready for this. We had an NFL quarterback in front of him. That's a great problem they had. Hope we end up with that again.

He's ready to go. Prepared, worked hard. I think he'll really play well. I'll be really surprised if he doesn't.

Q. Will Jordan Bernstine be in when you play nickel?

COACH FERENTZ: If we were going nickel, he'd be in there for sure. He might be in there for the start of the game. It's really good competition right now, really close with all those guys. We got guys double listed at the corner position. With B.J. being out there, that's affected us a little bit. We'll try to get the best four guys,

five guys on the field. He's in the conversation certainly.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: I think so. I think so. He's not starting the game, he'll be out there playing some.

Q. What about Collin Sleeper?

COACH FERENTZ: He's done a great job, too. When you talk about Jordan, they're both doing really well. Collin is a little bit like Joe on the scout team last year working against our offensive team. Collin really caught my attention when we played Michigan just because of the way they played their weak safety. He was imitating that player, did a nice job. Joe Forgy is going against (indiscernible) all the time, working really hard. I think we've seen some things a year ago on the scout team end of it where these guys have a chance to play well against good people.

Collin has done a good job. The door is open for him with graduation. He's done a good job competing back there spring, summer. I'd expect him to play well, too. He might make a couple mistakes like all the new guys, but he'll play well.

Q. Where did he come from?

COACH FERENTZ: Hence the name 'Sleeper'. It's a play on words there a bit. You know, sometimes it happens. I can't explain it. Just kept catching your eye on special teams. We had pretty good safety play. That's just one of those deals. But the door's open for him. To his credit, he's done a good job, really a good job. That started really in December in the bowl prep. Gave him a chance to get some real quality work in there. He's improved with every phase.

Q. What about Tom Donatell?

COACH FERENTZ: He's a student of the game, works hard. Injury sometimes opens the door with Dakota being out, then Shane DiBona that was going to be out there. Unfortunately had a season-ending injury. That's given Tommy a niche, if you will. We expect to use him on special teams as well. That position has evolved over the years with guys out in space an awful lot. In some ways it's like being a safety. This week, that guy will be more of a safety than he will be a linebacker. There's a blend there. I think it seems

like it's worked out well for both parties.

Q. How much has A.J. had to come along in terms of the type of quarterback he was in high school and for what you want him to do?

COACH FERENTZ: I think it was a big learning curve for him certainly. One thing about him, he's an excellent high school football player. I think he's becoming a good college quarterback. It's a progression. The one thing he has, probably as good as anybody we have back there, he's got excellent feet. That's a good thing for him. He's got great size. He's a competitive guy.

It's coming along well. Just hopefully he'll continue to improve, and we expect him to.

Q. Is it tricky to do what you need him to do but keep his best assets?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. We can bend left or right depending on who we've got. We've tried to do that through the years. Guys that can run around a little bit, you think about Drew Tate, certainly Brad Banks, they could move around a little bit back there. Other guys haven't been quite as nimble. I'm not saying he's Brad or Drew. But he'll move around a little bit and move the ball around a little bit more than maybe some other guys would.

Q. Do you have any special packages for Derby?

COACH FERENTZ: I think right now we're going to give James his opportunity and see what happens, see how it goes from there.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: It's possible. I don't know if we'll get there or not. Depends on how he comes along and what happens with our other guys. It's possible, but I don't think it's likely at this point. We're not closing the door on anybody at this stage. We'll probably know more here a couple weeks into things.

Q. Mike Meyer and Trent Mossbrucker, how is that going to work?

COACH FERENTZ: Right now Mike is our starter. But like I say, Trent was down and out there for a while, didn't perform well. I'm just going back to December, was struggling there. I think he lost his confidence. Certainly in the spring he looked that way, too.

Right now all three of those guys are competing well. That's one positive thing I can talk about. You see the ball go through the goalpost, you know that's good. All three of those guys have done a really good job.

Q. Who do you have behind Eric Guthrie? Is it still John?

COACH FERENTZ: It would be John Wienke if we were playing tomorrow, uh-huh.

Q. Asking you about runningback.

COACH FERENTZ: We'll know more Saturday.

Q. How much did Markus get hit at camp?

COACH FERENTZ: You know, he got hit. He didn't get tackled, but he got hit. Typically guys that have been tackled in games, we're careful about opportunities we give them, be it receivers, tight ends, running back, you know, with exception. But the guys like Moeaki, we weren't going to get him tackled certainly. But running backs that are going to get tackled a bunch this year, we usually are careful. We were careful on that. He's done all the full-speed blocking drills, blitz pickups, all that kind of stuff.

You want to be smart, but you just can't sit in meetings and watch film. It would be nice, but it doesn't work that way. Although we may get there someday. I know legislation is trying to move us in that direction.

Q. Do you have an idea yet, have any of the freshmen running backs, any separation or you don't know yet?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, you know, there's been some. But we'll see. We'll see what they do. That's the biggest thing.

Q. What do you teach them first?

COACH FERENTZ: Hang onto the ball, blitz pickup. That was the biggest concern with Marcus in the bowl game, blitz pickups. You hate to see a quarterback get nailed by a guy on block. That's always the biggest thing. It's tricky. That's something most of them have never done before, so it can be a little tricky. That's your biggest fear in any game, especially early-season games, someone running through, any position, not just the running back. A guy running up the middle, A

or B gap, punt protection, which we saw last year, or pass protection. That's not good. Keep our fingers crossed. Then holding the ball, they got to hold the ball a little bit different, too.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH FERENTZ: All that being said, sometimes the guy's first carry is going to be his first carry. You can't wait till they're a fifth-year senior to do that. They'll do fine. It's kind of like the kick return stuff or kickoff coverage. If a guy has a bad day, the ball might come out to the 40, we'll have to live with it. If we turn it over, we'll have to live with that, too. That's the biggest thing.

Q. Different types of guys back there, too, like Jordan Bernstine is different than Micah Hyde. Does that play into it as well?

COACH FERENTZ: It does. But it's not like the quarterback thing. We'll do what we have to. If our best guy is a power runner, if it's Shonn Greene, we'll go with Shonn Greene's best runs, if it's Fred Russell, those guys have a different way of doing things. You try to bend towards whatever a guy can do.

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