

November 15, 2011



An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: Captains are the same four players. We've got Tyler Nielsen, Mike Daniels defensively and Marvin McNutt and James Vandenberg offensively.

Just take one minute and congratulate Marvin; he achieved another milestone Saturday, with the receiving yards for a career. I think the thing that's really noteworthy about that, right now he's averaging 17.92 a catch, which puts him about a full yard ahead of the next guy, which I believe is Tim Dwight. As far as, you know, the yards per catch, that's pretty significant. And then just glancing through those notes, three names that caught my attention on that list we already mentioned, Tim Dwight and Danan Hughes. Well, Marvin moved past the touchdown reception deal, but also Ronnie Harmon being on that list, three guys that had pretty good NFL careers, obviously great careers here at Iowa.

So Marvin has really put himself into a real select group of guys there for sure, so congratulations to him. It's a real tribute to his hard work, and he's really set a good example for all of our guys.

We have a big challenge this week playing Purdue. They're an excellent football team, really playing well right now and coming off a big win. It looks like they've gotten better with each week. A couple things jump out about Purdue. We haven't played them in a couple years. I remember back in '09 just kind of following what they were doing, and I think it's really significant that year is we got ready for Ohio State, it was a real good tape to watch, they played very well against Ohio State, beat Ohio State that year, also beat Michigan. It's a pretty good accomplishment to beat those two schools in one season.

Last year I know they had a lot of injuries, but if you look at the end of the year they were still playing hard and playing very well. Then certainly this year they've had some great home wins already with Ohio State, Illinois, Minnesota on their ledger and they went out to Penn State I think it was the week after we played or two weeks after, I believe it was the week after, and gave them a heck of a game, and we know how tough they are.

They've got a good football team. They've got depth and productivity at quarterback, certainly an experience there. The quarterbacks are playing very well, excellent running backs, the receivers are really talented, so they're really a tough team to defend. And defensively they're playing very aggressively, which is what they've done in the past, and it looks reminiscent of that, and it starts up front. They've got a real dominant front four certainly, and two of those players were recognized by the Big Ten Player of the Week honors last week. So it's a real tribute to those guys, too.

And then on special teams; leading the conference on kickoff returns. It's as good a return team as we've seen, three excellent returners, and their field goal kicker probably has the strongest leg -- I can't imagine anybody has got a stronger leg in the country than he does.

We've got a lot to get ready for, and we're going on the road. Haven't done well there certainly, so that's one more challenge, and we'll get to work this afternoon.

Q. Where are you guys at injury wise?

COACH FERENTZ: I think pretty good. I think we're doing pretty well, so that's a positive.

Q. Keenan is okay?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I told Mark on the teleconference earlier, this has been our year for ankles. James Morris, Tom Nardo, first two that come to mind, and when players come off those,

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they're going to retweak them, if you will, for lack of a better term, reaggravate. It's part of the process, and the good news is he was doing well on Sunday. It's just part of the process. Unless you take about eight weeks off, it's really hard to come back full speed. Hopefully he'll get totally well in December.

Q. How about Fiedorowicz?

COACH FERENTZ: He's fine, yeah. No practice today.

Q. What kind of challenges does Short present? How does he compare with Still or Worthy?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, the thing about Still, that's going back a ways, but the last two weeks we've played pretty good defensive lines with pretty strong guys inside, Worthy being one, certainly Martin the week before, Still, throw him in the category, too. You can compare and contrast the common denominators. They're all really good, tough to block, and they're big on top of it.

But they've got a couple big guys in there certainly with Gaston, as well, and it's a real challenge.

Q. How do they use those two quarterbacks? What determines who goes where?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not sure I know 100 percent. The big thing is that they both do well. Marve came in last week, led them to victory, and the other quarterback has really been playing well and has got a little bit of an injury situation apparently, can't be too severe. The good news is for them they've got a fifth year senior coming off the bench who really did a nice job last year, a 3rd and 12 conversion I believe it was to move it down in there and finish it off with a touchdown. That's a critical spot, and they didn't miss a beat when they had to go to the bullpen. So it's a pretty good situation to have.

I've heard Coach Hope talk in the past just about how he felt pretty good about all their quarterbacks actually. They've got another guy hurt, but they've got pretty good depth at that position.

Q. What's the next step for James Vandenberg in his growth just to complete games?

COACH FERENTZ: I assume you're talking about Vandenberg? It's confusing when

you say James around here. It's like every other player. Every week is an adventure and every week hopefully you grow and improve, and that's what the game is all about. I don't think there's any one thing about it, but I think he's done a real good job.

Q. Why do you think your team has struggled on the road this season?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably haven't played as well as the opponent, and that's been one common denominator. We've had three road trips, I believe, and we been outplayed all three times, pure and simple. So it's a challenge for us to ramp up our level of performance.

Q. Is the plan still to use McCall this year?

COACH FERENTZ: We're hoping to. Yeah, we're hoping to. Hopefully this week will present that opportunity.

Q. If he wanted to redshirt now, could he?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. He's been out a ton. He's got an X-ray that would prove a pretty legitimate injury. The real surprise is that he has a chance to come back, and we'll just see how things go.

Q. Speaking of legitimate injuries, you touched on it a little bit on the teleconference, you've looked at the film. Anything raise red flags to you about last Saturday?

COACH FERENTZ: I'm more focused on the things we didn't do well enough, and they played really well. Bottom line is they played better, executed better than we did, and that's really the issue to me. That's kind of where I'm at right now on the whole thing.

Q. Do you send tapes in to the conference office, and if so, flag things and ask them to look at it, and if so, did somebody from Iowa ask them to possibly take a look at the rash of Michigan State injuries late in the game?

COACH FERENTZ: Yes, we send a tape in every week. That's part of our routine, not like, hey, boy, this cost us the game, but just for teaching purposes. On that topic, two parts to that answer. No, I don't think we're going to -- I've got it

on my desk, but I'm not planning on sending that in. I don't know how -- what good it would do? And then part B to that would be what good would it do? I don't know, it's a really complex issue, and it didn't decide the game certainly, but I know it's been talked about, not in a high degree but talked about a little bit, and I think the real challenge is who makes that determination. It's kind of like a concussion, how bad is a concussion, who makes the determination, all those things.

At the end of the day, it really didn't impact the game, but it's one of those -- I don't want to call it a hot topic, but it's going to be a topic that's out there for sure.

Q. The NFL is struggling with this issue. I don't know if you saw that Giants game way back when.

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't, but I heard about it.

Q. To me you probably --

COACH FERENTZ: It's a tough one.

Q. You can't question it being a legitimate injury because you just don't know.

COACH FERENTZ: It's a really tough one, and right now it's not real prominent in my thoughts. But I'm sure it'll be the subject of out-of-season discussion and they'll probably come up with some formula, probably hold a player out for a play or two, something like that. But it's just one of those things.

Q. At the college level or the pro level? The discussion?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I'm guessing, I haven't paid that close attention, I can't catch who the Giants were playing, but I did catch wind of that. I don't remember anyway, but I remember it being kind of discussed a little bit, so my guess is when things like that happen it goes to a committee and then they'll do something and then like a lot of our rules they trickle down to us. Once the NFL gets onto something, it kind of trickles our way.

Q. Sort of like a line change in hockey, Norm had brought it up before that the NFL does have rules where a defense can respond during a no-huddle offense during that time period. Did you see that, because that would take the question of injury out of it.

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I could see something like that happening, and that's probably what they'll do. I don't know if it'll be this year or not. But again, it didn't really impact the game. I don't think it's that big a deal. Some of those guys I was glad they did come out actually, on a lighter note. I wish they'd stayed out. I'm sorry.

Q. As a football coach what would you think if a team was intentionally doing that?

COACH FERENTZ: I just haven't given it that much thought, I've got to tell you. I've got about 12 things on my list -- actually probably about 112 that are ahead of that one. If it's within the rules, you do what you can to win, I guess. I don't know. But it hasn't really been in my mind too predominantly.

Q. What would you do if you thought one of your players was doing it?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. First, I don't know how I'd tell. Secondly, I don't know, I haven't really thought about that, either. I guess when it happens I'll have to think about it. We've got a lot of things to worry about right now besides that. I'm just glad our guys don't have an ankle injury. That would be worse.

Q. Expectations, preseason expectations, which hardly any of us put any stock in, but you're meeting those expectations that weren't the greatest, but yet fans predicted the world. Have you -- has Iowa football spoiled fans into thinking that every year should be a championship year?

COACH FERENTZ: Well, as you might well imagine I haven't had a chance to talk to too many fans. I did talk to a group of -- I'll segue on this one a little bit, a group of about 15 students on our campus that are veterans after the game Saturday, which is probably really good for me, to -- not that I want to talk to anybody after a game, but they were here on campus obviously, they go to school here, but they were kind enough to wait for me. I got a chance to talk to them a little bit. How did I get on this tangent?

But anyway, I guess I remember now. I got to talk to them, and we talked about things outside of who's supposed to win or lose, that type of thing, and boy, they're an impressive group, really an impressive group. Some commonality, things that they had seen while in the service and

things that we see. But back to your question -- that was an impressive group.

Anyway, I don't get a chance to talk to a lot of fans this time of year, other than on Wednesday nights for an hour I get that opportunity. But our focus -- our goal is to win every game. That's how it is. It was that way in August, still is. We've got two left to go; that's really what we're going to worry about and then we'll figure things out after the season.

Q. I see Penn State is the only other team that has to close with two road games. Is that a scheduling thing that should be looked at and changed?

COACH FERENTZ: I hadn't thought about that one, either. Maybe I should put that on my list for postseason. It's, whatever, nine or 10 of our openers have been on the road. I know it's more than half. I don't know if that's good or bad. I'll have to go back and track it. But I've always looked at it like once you get that out of the way you've got the home field advantage, ready to go four and three the rest of the way. But I can't put a positive spin on this one, other than it gives us two opportunities to win on the road. We haven't done it yet, so that's a good thing.

Q. There's a chance that the Big Ten could have as many as ten teams Bowl eligible. Two questions with that. One, what does that say about the level of competition in the Big Ten, and two, do you think that six wins will be enough for you guys this year to get to a Bowl game?

COACH FERENTZ: I can't answer the second one, and the first part, it just seems like anybody can beat anybody for the most part. That's kind of what we see week to week. It looks that way, at least. I don't know if that's good or bad. That's what it looks like.

Q. This team is 3 and 0 following defeats this year. Similar to that, two-part question. What's been the threat in this team being able to bounce back, and is last week's loss in particular a little bit tougher to come back from, considering what went into it?

COACH FERENTZ: They're all tough, and the first part of the answer is they're all tough. Second part is I wish we hadn't had three opportunities to do that, and I really wish we didn't have four, and what we do with this fourth one, we'll see what we do this week. It's hard to predict

what's going to happen. I know we're playing a good team in their place where they've played well. We've got our hands full. We'll see what we've got.

Q. When the Big Ten announced that Purdue was stapled with Iowa as its permanent cross-over rival, did you give it any thought or did you shrug your shoulders and go, okay, that's it?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's probably about it. It was going to be somebody. Yeah, I didn't think too much about it.

Q. No, great --

COACH FERENTZ: I'll ask you a question since we're asking questions back and forth. Do other conferences do that? I've never really paid attention to this divisional play, but I think it's a great concept quite frankly and the way they went about things, I thought that was pretty neat, and I don't know if other conferences do it. Since we're talking about stuff that has nothing to do with the game, you know.

Q. The SEC does.

COACH FERENTZ: Do they? It's a good concept.

Q. This will be Purdue's senior day. You just came off one. Do you find sometimes teams are a little distracted when they've got all this going on, and does it play to an advantage for a visiting team?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, if it was as easy as that, I'd probably discontinue senior day because it didn't work out well last week for us. But I think there are other factors usually involved. You know, your last game in your stadium is always memorable, be it high school, I think, college certainly, but how much it impacts a game, I don't know. I don't think it hurts a team. I don't think it does. I don't think it helps them, but I don't think it hurts typically.

Q. How is recruiting going?

COACH FERENTZ: It's all -- everyone that's on our list can say two months from now they're going somewhere else, but I think it's going well as far as I can gauge it. It's just really hard to gauge. We're excited about the response thus far, and I have every reason to think it's going to be

okay, but time will tell.

Q. November is traditionally a slow month --

COACH FERENTZ: Everybody is pretty busy right now and then we'll pick up dramatically after the last game certainly, after the 12th game.

Q. When you go on road trips, how much do you try to keep the routine the same as the routine you guys do at home?

COACH FERENTZ: Really similar, and we leave the building typically here on a Friday if we're home, 5:30, and then we get to the hotel and we're kind of locked in and try to simulate the same thing on the road. We shift one meeting but try to give the guys a little quiet time but not too much and then just kind of roll like we would if we were in Cedar Rapids, so it's pretty much the same deal.

Q. I hate to ask this question because we've already been scolded for asking stuff that's not about the game --

COACH FERENTZ: I didn't scold anybody, I pointed out that we were talking about things that have nothing to do with the game, and I am more focused on the game.

Q. This is totally not about football at all. What number were you at UConn, and was there a meaning behind that number?

COACH FERENTZ: I was 85 initially, ended up 36, and I can't tell you why. Two years in 85, two years in 36, and they're still trying to get rid of those jerseys, I can promise you. So that's kind of where it is.

Q. I know you have recruits who come in and want a certain number. How do you deal with that, and do you try to accommodate them if possible?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, you're right, I have no interest in all this stuff, but it is really of -- like a lot of things that have changed over the last 10 years, I think that's a bigger and bigger thing for guys. Usually the first thing we'll tell them is Bob Sanders wasn't 33 in high school, but he became -- he made 33 pretty famous around here, and Dallas Clark made 44 pretty famous. But it is something people are interested in.

Q. Purdue has a really good kick return, something you struggled with against Michigan State, something you thought you

had corrected about midway through the season. How worried are you about that?

COACH FERENTZ: Really worried because they're first in the league and for a good reason. It's kind of like the quarterback situation; they've got three good returners, not just one. So it's a dangerous group. They play hard on all their special teams. And the thing about kick returns, it's kind of like a pass play. If you're not on top of your game, everybody who doesn't fit in where they're supposed to, you run the risk of giving up something big, and we know that all too well. We've had a couple balls come out to midfield and that is just not a good situation, and it's hard to put a defense out there at midfield off a kick return.

We're going to have to be at our best. The good news is when we do it right -- the other day they hit one out to midfield and they ran the same return another time in the game and we nailed it pretty well. It's pretty much like it's been all season long. If guys are where they're supposed to be, we have a chance, I think, of defending anybody. But if you leave the door open, especially against this team this week, they're going to capitalize.

Q. Do you think next year you have a chance to have an experienced special teams unit? The last couple years you've had to use true freshmen quite a bit.

COACH FERENTZ: I think we're improving. Our consistency isn't where it needs to be. We'll pick up two players that should have been or could have been helping us right now. Could have been, should have been, all that stuff. But with Dakota Getz and Shane DiBona, that chipped in. Our linebackers are typically guys you count on for special teams, so that part is encouraging. But we've been down the last two years a little bit at that number, and I think we're all familiar with the linebacker injuries we've had the last two seasons. It's been significant.

Q. Do you think the last two or three weeks of the season defines what a football team is all about?

COACH FERENTZ: It's certainly part of the story. I think every week is important. I guess I would say the same thing that I would tell -- I do tell our team. It's not so much the winning and losing but it's just how you go about your business. And that's really true all year long. But the schedule changes this time of year. We try to be a

little smarter, if you will, or just aware that it's a long season. It's a lot of -- a long grind physically and mentally, so we have a pattern that we'll try to follow.

But at the end of the day it's just about how we do things, what we do on a daily basis, academically, socially on and off the field, and if you're doing things right, there's no way to predict what the season is going to be record wise, but I think over the long haul you have success, and that's kind of been our guiding light for 13 years. So yeah, I think this month is really important from that standpoint, just how we do things, how we prepare and then how we compete.

Q. Do players watch won-loss standings as closely as the rest of the world, and if so, is the realization that they're out of the race a cause for a natural letdown?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think we're mathematically out of it, I don't think. I haven't paid attention. But yeah, common sense would dictate. But my guess is, yeah, they pay attention to it a lot more than I do, because that's what people do, and I understand that. Players are more like fans than coaches probably, except they've got to practice.

Yeah, they watch that. But there's still a lot to play for. Any time -- this goes back to '99: The minute we're out of the race we're trying to build on the next one, trying to get ready for the next one. At some point we're going to be in one, and you're either -- simple as you're either putting money into the bank or you're taking it out. We live in a credit card society. I don't think it's a good way to live, and it's certainly not a good way to be a football player or a competitor or a student.

Q. What does that mean?

COACH FERENTZ: If you're not putting money in on a regular basis, you're going to -- anybody can go out and spend on credit. I guess we're the nation of experts in that regard.

But it's just not a good way to live. It gets you in some serious trouble. Our deal has always been just to try to work hard every day, and when you do that, you're putting something in the bank account, and sooner or later you're going to save enough hopefully to get what you want to get.

Q. You've been within striking distance in the fourth quarter all three games on the road. When you look back, is there a common

thread, common denominator as to why it hasn't worked out yet?

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think so. I think it's usually a different scenario in every game. As you might imagine, probably more focused on our four losses. Everyone is a different story, I think. Three of them on the road, one at home, and I guess that's a 75 percent common denominator. But every story is a little bit different, how we lost it or what plays might have been critical. The other common denominator is there's usually at least 10 to 12 plays or situations that could have changed the outcome. The one common denominator, too, our road games, they've all been close, whereas Saturday wasn't. We got nailed pretty good.

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