

**February 8, 2012**



An Interview With:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, just welcome to everybody. Sorry this is the first time I've had a chance to say something publicly about Ken O'Keefe. Just want to take this opportunity, much like Norm, when Norm retired in December, I just want to say thanks to Ken for all that he's done for us here. He's just a tremendous football coach. He's been an outstanding teacher and a really strong leader in this program, and that's something I'm really very, very appreciative of. He's just done a tremendous job, absolutely tremendous job.

Like losing Norm, too, I just can't say how grateful I am for what they've done and how lucky I feel like we've been here to have consistent leadership here for 13 years at those two positions.

You know, it's part of football. Change is part of football, whether guys retire, Norm retired, Carl a couple years ago, and our guys moving on to opportunities, going back to our first year Pat Flaherty who coached in the Super Bowl the other day, offensive line coach with the Giants who left us after the '99 season. Obviously Joe Philbin, who's transferred into a pretty good position, Ron Aiken and now Ken. Those are great opportunities.

It was a tough decision for Ken. I don't want to speak for Ken, but one of those things he had to weigh and measure, and just, again, can't say how appreciative I am personally. I think everybody involved with the program is appreciative. I know they are, of what he's done for our program, and he's helped our success.

Regarding the defensive staff, the first thing I'll say is we just had a lot of tremendous options. I feel really fortunate there, and I've always felt like coaching here, if you do things and take your time a little bit and look around a little bit,

I think there's always going to be great options available, and we had plenty of them certainly, both externally, and I think we had a couple options internally that really looked good. I took my time on this thing, but really the conclusion I came up to is that Phil I think right now is the best fit for our program at this given point. Certainly Phil has proven himself through the years, 13 years here, and I think it was 13 at Toledo, also, so he's been an outstanding position coach.

Over the last several years he's had two opportunities to go to BCS schools, one which was a top-ten ranked team the past couple years. They entertained offers to him to become coordinator, and he chose to stay here, which I'm appreciative of. That's not the reason I hired him. It's just because I just think he'll do outstanding job in that role. It's about as simple as that.

And obviously I think also we're going to get great support from the defensive staff, like Norm has enjoyed for the last 13 years.

On that note, Darrell is going to shift over to the secondary position. Darrell, like Phil, has done a great job here. He's been on outstanding linebacker coach, done a great job with special teams, done a great job recruiting, and I can't say enough about what he's done, and he's assuming a very important role. Coaching the secondary is extremely important. We've got to have a great person there. I think we've got that in Darrell. Very, very confident, it's in his background. He'll do a great job there.

And I think also it's going to allow Phil to roam a little bit and oversee things a little bit more, which is certainly critical.

And then moving up front with Reese Morgan, same thing. I would just tell you the same thing about Reese. He's a tremendous teacher. He's been an outstanding coach. He was an outstanding coach at Benton Community, an outstanding job at West High, two places where they hadn't had a lot of success, and he brought

that same expertise to our program back after I believe it was when Pat left.

He's done a great, great job. To me he's done a great job building players, helping them develop and improve. You just have to look at last year's group to I think verify that he'll get guys like Zusevics and Gettis came in here as 225-pound kids out of high school, look at Riley Reiff who came in here as a defensive end who ended up transitioning over to offense. It sounds like Riley is going to be a pretty high pick in the coming draft. Marcus and Adam are going to be drafted, too. All three of those guys are going to the combine. You can go down the line, but that's a pretty good snapshot of the kind of work that Reese does.

I'm really comfortable that he'll do a great job with the transition over. We went through the same process when Ron Aiken left. We took Rick, who was an offensive line GA, and moved him over. Rick did a great job, and I don't think you can argue with Reese's wealth of knowledge and background. I think it's safe to assume he can do the same kind of job and maybe more so.

So I'm really excited about that, as well. Obviously you can't play good defense without a good front, and it's the same way on offense. So I'm really excited about that, and I think Reese is, too.

Obviously we've got three spots to fill right now, and it's really no different than what we've been doing the last month or so. To me the key thing is getting the right people, and the calendar is important to some degree, but what's more important I think is we get the right people in place for this program, for this team, and the good news is we're not playing until September 1st. So we've got some time here. It's important, but it's certainly not critical. I think what's critical is getting the right people here, and that's the approach we'll take moving forward.

You know, obviously with our football team, we flipped the calendar back on January 1st. It was tough to lose in the Bowl game. Never much fun. I can't remember having a good feeling coming out of a Bowl game after a loss. I think our guys played hard and competed, but it's not as much fun certainly when you come up short, and that's what happened there.

We all turned the page back on January 1st. It's 2012 now, and our focus has been on recruiting. I think the staff did a great job there. Our players got back here right after Martin Luther King Day and began the out-of-season program, strength and conditioning work, and they're doing a

great job there and off to a good start academically.

It's exciting now with the staff back on campus. This is our second week back off the road. It's just good to be back around the players, interfacing with them and having a chance to sit down and visit with them and just talk about expectations, talk about goals, those types of things, which is always the most enjoyable part about coaching.

We're all excited to push forward. Obviously we've got a lot of work to do right now. We have adjusted the spring schedule just slightly. We're going to start a couple days later. We'll start that on a Saturday, Sunday, I believe it's the 24th, 25th, I believe, and push the conclusion of spring ball back a week. I think that'll be advantageous for us, and outside of that not a lot different on that front.

Those days will come quick. We'll look forward to that.

And then the last part, just as Chris mentioned, we'll try to make the coordinators available certainly before spring practice starts and also plan on not only the other two new hires being available to everybody but probably the entire staff because we do have guys in different seats right now. Over the course of spring practice, I'll try to make sure everybody gets a chance to visit with you and just answer any questions you may have.

With that I'll throw it out.

**Q. How surprised were you by Ken's departure, and I guess a two-part, what are you looking for in a replacement?**

COACH FERENTZ: I wasn't surprised at all. I think probably the big factor there was Joe going to get a job, and then secondly, was he going to pursue an opportunity. They went through certainly a life-changing experience. When that took place, I kind of anticipated -- I assumed that Joe would contact Ken and talk to him about that, and Joe was great about that. He called me and expressed his intentions.

And then the second part of that equation was what was Ken going to decide to do? My gut told me he could have gone either way, at least that's how I felt, and I think if you asked him, he'd tell you the same thing.

That's part of coaching, so our timetable moving forward really isn't a firm one. We're just committed to getting the right person, and that's

going to be a tough seat to fill, just like Norm's. We've been really fortunate, so obviously I think we all want to just make sure that we get the right person there to help move us forward.

**Q. You mentioned that there was a lot of interest both internally and externally for the defensive coordinator position. What was, I guess, the timeline of events, if you will, as far as when you first started noticing the interest and then when you started dwindling it down to maybe a few potential candidates?**

COACH FERENTZ: That's really been a process, and the interest any time a job opens up it doesn't take long for names to appear in front of you. That's probably everywhere. So there were a lot of interesting candidates, and new ones kept appearing along the way.

I just didn't see any advantage to moving quickly. Unless you have to, there's no real advantage to that. So I just wanted to kind of sift through it, and I'm really glad that I did because my mind was in a couple different places, but I think certainly at some point I became a little bit more focused in terms of where I thought the right avenue would be, and it's probably like a prospect trying to figure out what school they want to go to. You want to take your time and feel really good about it. And then I wanted to take some time and make sure I felt good about it before I said anything publicly.

I don't want to put a timeline on it, but I've been all over the place in terms of thoughts, and I think I owe that to the program and our team to make sure that we try to be as thorough as we can be.

**Q. How much did recruiting play a role in terms of making a decision before or after signing day?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not at all. If it had, we could have made a decision back in December. We could have done this right after Norm retired for where we ended up. But I didn't see any compelling reason to. I don't think it really affected recruiting in the least. I can't give you quantitative evidence of that. But I don't see it being a huge factor.

What we told recruits is we're going to have good coaches. Just look at who's -- I mentioned the guys that have left here. We've had a lot of guys leave here to go to successful, more, quote-unquote, elite jobs or prestigious jobs,

whatever. We've had pretty good guys here. We've been really fortunate.

**Q. What was the thinking for giving Reese Morgan the defensive line?**

COACH FERENTZ: As I kind of alluded to a minute ago, that's a real critical position, and I feel the same way about the offensive line, and we had some really good candidates for that spot, as well, people I was really interested and intrigued with and would not hesitate to bring here. I can think of two guys off the top of my head right now that I'd really without hesitation ask them to come, but I just think this is going to give us our best possible match right now, and I think Reese will be a good fit with that group. It's a very young group right now, as you well know. It's probably the least experienced group that we have on our football team.

I've seen Reese work with groups like that before, with our offensive line, back a couple years ago, the job he did after the '09 season with that group. I thought those guys really played well a year ago. You know, Reese -- to me, Reese is a builder. He's a guy that really builds players up, helps them develop in a really positive way, and it's going to be -- we've got our work cut out there.

But I'll also say this: We went through our entire defensive personnel today. We've been holding off on that meeting until we had everybody in the seats, and just kind of reviewed every players' strengths, weaknesses, that type of thing. We're going to be young, we're going to be inexperienced, but I think Reese is real excited to work with that group, and I'm excited to see what those guys do this spring, and I think they'll make a lot of improvement here in the next six months before we start playing.

**Q. Was it something he proposed or something you came up with?**

COACH FERENTZ: Fair to say he was a little surprised on that one. But I guess I've got some executive privilege. I exercised it.

**Q. Ken (O'Keefe) is also the quarterback coach, or was the quarterback coach. How does that impact who you look for offensively?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think we've got some avenues, some people with flexibility on our staff position-wise, and there's some good people

out there, too. Again, it's about getting the best person. Just like Norm, this is going to be a tough seat to fill, and I'm out looking -- with Phil I wasn't looking for a carbon copy of Norm. I don't think that was the criteria, and certainly it's the same way with Ken's seat, too. But there are traits that we are looking for, not necessarily schematic things but traits, and I think that's probably the most important thing. We're not going to play man coverage every down, I can tell you that. We're not playing the 4-6, blitz, here comes a man. We're not going to be a 3-4 team. Those are two things I don't think that are realistic here traditionally, and that's time tested, at least 30 years' worth, 35 years' worth. But outside of that, I was open to anything defensively.

And the same thing offensively; I think there's certain things that we're going to try to hang our hat on, but we're open to getting the best person.

**Q. You had Levar (Woods) playing the interim role as the D-line coach last month. What role is there for him now if he even has a role on your staff?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's still the interim coach as far as I know, at least. We'll let him run through the process. He's certainly interested in working here, and we'll let him go through the process. Hopefully he'll do well in the weeks ahead here and we'll find a seat for him.

**Q. Does moving Reese (Morgan) have anything to do with who you're maybe trying to bring in on offense?**

COACH FERENTZ: We wouldn't have done that if we didn't feel like we had options, options that might work out. Again, there were guys on the defensive front that I think would have been really good here, too. We'll just kind of see where it goes here, but I think we have options at every position if we have to. Hopefully we don't.

**Q. Do you intend to have the offensive coordinator be just the offensive coordinator?**

COACH FERENTZ: Most likely he'll -- I kind of envision him now being in Ken's role, most likely probably the quarterback coach. I think that works pretty well. There's a possibility. I could see maybe a tight end coach being a coordinator. There's other ways to get around it, but off the top of my head I'd say that's probably the most logical way to do it.

**Q. Are you still intending to have Darrell (Wilson) coach special teams, as well?**

COACH FERENTZ: He'll be involved, most definitely.

**Q. Do you expect internal candidates for the offensive coordinator?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not ruling anything out right now. We're just going to take a little time here and think about things and see what's out there. But I think we'll figure it out in time.

**Q. Given that you haven't had this much turnover with your coaching staff since you came here, from a general perspective, how are you viewing this both for next season and I guess for the future of the program?**

COACH FERENTZ: I guess I look at it, we probably cheated time here a little bit. I don't know if that's the right way to say it. But we certainly did better than maybe anybody could have realistically anticipated. Probably somewhere in the middle of that 2000 season, I don't think anybody envisioned the head coach or two coordinators making it for 13 years.

The way I look at it, I'm just really appreciative and grateful. I mentioned when Norm retired, nine years with Bill Brazier, 13 with Norm; that's a pretty good streak right there. And then with Ken kind of the same way. I think I was with Bill for eight years now, then Carl for a year and then 13 with Ken. So I've been pretty lucky. I feel really fortunate. Right now I'd settle for ten out of the next two guys. That would be great if we could get ten. I'll be, what, 66. I'll have to figure that out then. Somebody will feel sorry for me and come join us at that point.

**Q. Do you see any similarities between what's going on now and Hayden back in the late '80s?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, actually all three of us left here at the same time, Bernie, Dan and myself left after the '89 season. Coincidentally they played in the Rose Bowl. There might be a message there; get a new line coach and something good happens. I think that might be subliminal messages right there.

They brought great guys in, and it worked fine. So it's -- this happens in coaching all the time, it just hasn't happened here a lot. But with it



comes opportunity. I'd just cite the guys that we've been able to hire since we've lost guys through the years. Sometimes new ideas and fresh voices are good. I hope at least it's going to be invigorating for Darrell and Reese to be in new positions. I think that could be really a lot of fun for those guys professionally, and they've got good groups to work with. They'll have different kinds of challenges, but I think it's going to be invigorating for them.

**Q. When you have a person on the outside that has interest in a vacancy on your staff, what do they have to do to leave an impression on you as far as you willing to make an offer? For example, when you hired Eric Campbell, what was it about him at the time that allowed you to say, okay, I want to take a chance on him?**

COACH FERENTZ: This is going to be a contradiction because I'm not a résumé guy in terms of name brands. I just go back to the staff that I joined in '81. That's always kind of been my -- I can think of a couple pro teams, too, if you look at -- where they've had success with guys that maybe aren't résumé guys. But I am a résumé guy in that I think résumés tell a lot just in terms of the price you've paid to coach.

To Eric's point, I've always said I would never hire a guy from a name-brand school. Take a guy from Michigan? What was I doing? But he did the hard work at Ball State, he was at Navy, he was at Syracuse as a young guy. He paid his dues, and he was also a 13-year veteran, I believe, at Michigan, so he wasn't a vagabond guy knocking on every door and trying to get to the next bus stop.

There are certain things you look for, but above everything, you want guys that are going to be good teachers and guys that are going to be good team players. I'm all for new ideas and what have you.

But I think it's better if they -- just like a player has got to buy into it -- I think coaches have to buy into it, too, and we've all got to share some common bond that way, not that we all have to be alike because we're not going to be, but I guess that that kind of answers the question.

But good coaches come from everywhere, anyplace, everywhere. That's one thing I've learned. Here's Eric coming from Michigan, 13 years, and you look at Reese's résumé screams great teacher, great coach. Talk to anybody, we're always trying to embarrass Reese. We're standing

in a parking lot in Colorado outside a high school, a car pulls up, a guy jumps out, "Coach Morgan," played for Reese at Fountain Community like 35 years ago. But everywhere you go, somebody knows Reese and it's always an enthusiastic response.

That's good stuff there. That's good stuff.

**Q. On the budget here, is that --**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll be fine. Budget-wise, is that what you're saying?

**Q. Do you have parameters that you need to be within?**

COACH FERENTZ: I imagine. I'm not going to worry too much about that. But I think -- I don't think that's going to be an issue. I don't think we're going to try to sign a superstar coach or anything like that. I don't think we have to. If we had to, I'm happy to talk to Gary about it, and I think Gary has been nothing but supportive since he showed up on campus. I'm sure if I had a good reason, he'd listen to it.

**Q. Can you not say anything on an external hire until after February 10th?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not aware of that, but maybe we do. Everything is moving along fairly well. Like any place that you work, I'm sure you want to be doing all the right things, and I'm trusting Paul to keep me out of trouble there, Paul Federici, does a great job, makes sure I'm on time and keeps me out of trouble.

**Q. What are the chances that your son Brian comes back?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, we're open to anything right now, anybody that's out there that has a chance to really help our football team. I mean, we're open to anything. He's got a pretty good job right now. Could have been a little better, but he's got a pretty good job where he's at and I'm really happy for him.

**Q. You think highly of him though; do you try to coax him out of New England?**

COACH FERENTZ: There are a lot of guys I think really highly of. There are a lot of good coaches out there. One thing I'm pretty sure, I'm really confident we're going to get a good guy or we wouldn't have moved Reese. That's for sure. I think we'll be fine there.

**Q. Given how much offense at the college level and the pro level has evolved and changed so much over the past decade, does the fact that you now have an opening at offensive coordinator give you pause to say, hey, maybe we try something a little different here?**

COACH FERENTZ: First of all, I'm not sure they've changed that much. That's just my opinion. And then the flipside is I'm open to anything. If they're a good fit on our staff, and as long as they believe in blocking, I think that's something you've got to do. I think you've got to execute on offense whatever your style may be. The big thing is we'll try to fit the personnel that we have, and that changes year to year, and try to be intelligent about that.

As a head coach what I'm interested in is we've got to block -- we've got to make the makeable plays and make sure we're doing a good job in turnover ratio. I think that's really critical if you're going to try to get somewhere.

But I'm into a lot of different styles. Michigan a couple years ago threw the ball a mile a minute, played high tempo and all that; and look at the National Championship team, Alabama, and they're not winging it around every play but they do what they have to do to win, and that's kind of what we're hoping to do.

**Q. Given the compensation levels for the most recent coordinator hires in the Big Ten, do you feel any sense of restrictions on your ability to remain competitive in that market?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I think there're a lot of approaches you can take. We had one school that just brought a new standard of pay, Southeastern Conference prices move north, and that's the trend in college sports. That's TV. You understand it a little better than I do. But the game has changed a lot that way, just in terms of the revenue and all those types of things.

But at the end of the day, I'm really comfortable with the parameters we've been working in, and I'm really confident we're going to get good coaches to fit those parameters. If it becomes an issue, I'll talk to Gary about that, but I really don't foresee that. If it is an issue I'm sure he'll be supportive, within reason. I'm not going to go ask for something ridiculous, but I don't see that being an issue at all. I'm not worried about that in the least.

**Q. At the top you mentioned that timing was something that you thought you had on your side. Ideally with the remaining openings that you have on your staff, would you like to have those figured out before you start spring practices?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, yeah. Hopefully we can make some progress here in the next week to two weeks with a couple spots, and then a third spot whenever it happens, it's going to happen. But right now I think we've just got to make sure it's the right guy, certainly before we leave on spring break. We've got to know who that is certainly, but I'm more focused -- spring ball to me is about teaching the basics. It's about executing basic plays and just getting things taught -- we have a very young team right now so it's not like we can be on page 7 anyway, so we really have to start at the beginning. So I think that gives us a little wiggle room there, too. We're not going to move fast if it costs us the chance of getting the right guy, the best guy.

**Q. Is it difficult for coaches when peers, coworkers of a coach for many years, suddenly that coach is then lost?**

COACH FERENTZ: Shouldn't be. Obviously I thought of that during the whole process, but I think Phil has certainly earned everybody's respect in our building, players, former players, coaches on our staff, former coaches. And to that end, too, that's part of the reason I requested Darrell move into the secondary and Reese come into the defensive line, but that's the confidence I have in them. I've seen these guys teach the level they teach at and their professionalism.

I just -- I think it's going to be all good, and that's going to allow Phil to do his job better, by having those two bookends, if you will, the secondary and defensive line positions, really nailed down. There's going to be a learning curve certainly for those guys, but they'll learn fast. They're excellent football coaches. Darrell has done that before.

Coincidentally I talked to Pat Flaherty this morning, and Pat did the same thing at East Carolina. He was on the staff, got fired at Rutgers, lesson learned there, too, and his next job was defensive line coach at East Carolina. So he told Reese give him a call.

But good coaches can coach. That's something I've learned through the years.

**Q. Did you have a formal interview process with the candidates, or was Phil always the leader in the clubhouse?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, he wasn't always the leader. That wouldn't be fair to say that. I'm not sure I had -- I kind of had a leader, but it wasn't anything -- I just kind of wandered around the race a little bit and gathered information. Part of it was cleaning things up from December, too. December wasn't a great month. We finished with a loss at the end of the season, losing the Bowl, and it takes a little while to clean that stuff out. You bounce back a little quicker when you've got a game the next week, but I tend to dwell on things a little bit at the end of the year, so it was good to get my thought process going again and really look at it in a little bit more analytical way.

So again, I think we had several guys that I felt really confident would be good, and then it was just a matter of trying to get it down to the best guy for this time.

**Q. Other than the shared history, what about him really made the hire?**

COACH FERENTZ: Well, I think he's a really respected, outstanding coach, and I think he's got a vision for what he wants to do and the ability to communicate that to the staff and to our players and to lead our players ultimately. I don't want to speak for him, but I think that's probably the biggest challenge, at least I experienced this when I went to Maine. When you go from being in a room with linemen, 15, 18, 20 guys, in his case probably 15 defensive backs to a bigger group, there's a little bit of a -- it takes time, or at least it did for me, to try to adjust and be able to communicate and connect with a large group. I think that's probably the biggest adjustment because to me, whether it's 10 guys or 100, usually you're teaching, you're trying to get a message across and what have you. So I think that will be his biggest challenge.

But a big part of this equation, big part of the reason Norm was so good is he got great support. We had an excellent staff supporting him, and I feel very confident that it's going to shake up our defensive staff, too. I think it's going to be good. I'm really looking forward to it.

**Q. Is special teams going to be split?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, we'll keep dividing. A couple, three guys will have very prominent roles, Lester obviously and Darrell, too, but I want to make sure we don't short-change Darrell on the transition. I don't want to -- I might have to ease his burden a little bit. We've got four GAs coming in next year, too. That's something else that's been in the back of my mind, so we're increasing our ability to abuse guys. Now we've got four guys to abuse instead of two.

Yeah, it's going to help with the workload too, because there's a lot of film breakdown with special teams, so at least we have a little bit more manpower now. And I guess on that frontier, Charlie Bullen took a job with Miami, which I think is just fantastic. We've had two GAs that were brilliant; both those guys were smarter than everybody on the staff maybe with the exception of one or two of our guys. But Charlie and Dave were just outstanding, so it was really nice to see Charlie get a great opportunity.

**Q. Do you want quarterback coach covered by a full-time coach, so he'll be quarterback coaching --**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not following you, I'm sorry.

**Q. Do you want quarterbacks being coached by a full-time coach?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah.

**Q. Not a GA.**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, probably fair to say. I'm not 100-percent yet.

**Q. Could that possibly be one of the full-time jobs, a quarterback coach not associated with the coordinator?**

COACH FERENTZ: It could be, yeah. We could do that.

**Q. Given all the coaching changes and the fact that you were 8 and 5, became 7 and 6, the fact that for the second year in a row you lost your best running back, is there a sense that this is an offseason where the program really needs a jolt to get back in the right direction?**

COACH FERENTZ: I'm not looking at it that way. College football, there's no way to predict a lot that goes on. Some places it's a little

bit more predictable, but I could give you examples of places where you'd say, hey, it's pretty predictable that this team should be in the top 10, and I can show you examples where they ended up with a losing season. So that's part of college football, and I think every year you start new, and it's a new challenge certainly.

If the staff factors into it, which this year it does more so than in years past for us, it's a little varied degree of challenge for us, something different for us certainly, but it can be positive, too. A lot of things can be -- just depends how you look at it. Again, we've got a young football team right now, I kind of liken it to where we were in 2000 and 2001 and those were some of the most enjoyable years I've had coaching. We were coming out of the '07 season, although I've gone through this before, to me the low point of our program overall was that midpoint of '06 to midpoint of '07. To me that was the valley. I hope it was. I don't see us anywhere near there.

But hey, if we ended up there, then we're going to fight our way out of there, too. It wasn't the end of life. We bounced back.

At the end of the day, not that we want to be 7 and 6, but if that is the worst that ever happens here, we'll probably survive it better than some other people. But that's not where we're shooting to be by any stretch.

**Q. Were there defensive coordinator candidates that you were interested in and maybe the timing wasn't right for them or they weren't interested in moving?**

COACH FERENTZ: No, I don't think so. I have to think before I talk here, but no, I don't think so.

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