

**March 20, 2012**



An interview with:

## **COACH KIRK FERENTZ**

THE MODERATOR: We have Coach Ferentz.

COACH FERENTZ: Welcome, everybody. Good to have everybody here. I'm glad to hear about Bob doing well. I know everybody is concerned about him. He's a great guy. Glad he's doing better. Hope everybody is able to make it in the building. We have a lot of things going on around here, makes it tricky to get into work right now, but we're certainly excited about the indoor facility going up. It was good to see the structure starting to take shape. Our players are excited about that.

A little bit of an inconvenience right now with the remodeling, but it will be good to get in there next summer for sure.

Yesterday we had an NFL camp, hosted that. It's part of college football. We graduated a great group of seniors. Those guys worked out, did a nice job yesterday for a lot of NFL people. Had the combine I guess about a month ago, month and a half ago, somewhere in that ballpark. It's been kind of fun. Casey Wiegmann was back yesterday, came up with a group from Kansas City. Ran into Aaron Kampman this morning, up in the weight room. He's in town for a little bit. Scott Chandler walked in. Matt Kroul, those guys have been working out. Jeff Tarpinian, as well.

Good to see some of the former players around here training, around the building. That's always fun.

Obviously as we talked about our staff, we've had some changes with the staff. So it's been a busy several weeks here just getting ready for spring practice. We'll stay on the run here. So

it's been fun to get back to football, a lot of positive energy I think going on right now.

The team really had a good out-of-season. I know Chris and his staff were really pleased with the way the guys worked. Did a good job in the weight room with the speed conditioning work, all those things. Making some progress there.

It's good to see the guys doing a good job there, now we start the next phase. They all got back from spring break the last couple days here. We'll get going here tomorrow.

We're eager to get out on the field. Certainly it's a very important phase. Everybody realizes in college football, spring practice is a great opportunity to do a lot of teaching, a lot of fundamental work, learn a lot more about the players.

Certainly it's a chance for us right now, we have a very young football team. The one thing we talked about our team is the need to grow. We need to grow as a staff. Every player needs to grow. The veteran players, the guys that have been out there that have competed, had a chance to do good things, they need to play their best certainly next fall and need to lead.

Then we have that next level coming up, some are seniors, some are juniors, some obviously freshmen, but that next group that needs to take this opportunity and try to move up and demonstrate they're ready to play, too.

It's an ongoing process, a fun time of the year for coaches. We're eager to get started tomorrow.

With that I'll throw it out to questions.

**Q. How are you health-wise? Anybody out?**

COACH FERENTZ: I should have mentioned that. Really two guys that won't be out there, unfortunately one of our youngest group. The running backs, receivers, defensive line are young. Two of our more veteran guys, Dom Alvis,

being a veteran player, if you will. Then Carl Davis, a guy we're really counting on next year to step in, they'll both be out. Both recovering very well. They'll be out on the field at times.

I think right now Dom will be out there more than Carl. Carl is probably still a couple weeks away from doing any significant work out there. They should both be ready in June. Those are the two guys right now that are out of spring ball.

**Q. What is going on with Carl?**

COACH FERENTZ: He has a knee issue, too, that was addressed in January. He should be fine.

**Q. That's a young group of defensive linemen. Talk about that group.**

COACH FERENTZ: It is. Gets younger with Dom and Carl being out, unfortunately. It would have been good to have those guys out there to kind of see where we're at.

We're counting on Steve Bigach, we're counting on him to keep improving. Kind of leading that group. Joe Gaglione, another senior capable of doing some good things. This is his time to step it up and get going.

After that we are a very young group. Some of the guys you mentioned, redshirt freshmen, Riley, guys like Darian Cooper that we saw last year, Dean Tsopanides. Did a nice job on the scout team. Now it's a chance for them to learn what we're doing in our scheme, putting some things to use.

You look back, glanced at a depth chart in the last 24 hours, 2005, really veteran group in '04. Started out spring ball with Matt Kroul as a starter, defensive tackle, red shirt freshman at that point. Mitch King was second team will linebacker and third team middle linebacker going into spring ball. I think we moved him somewhere about halfway through spring.

That's kind of one of the neat things about spring ball, you never know where stories are going to come from. One constant is we always have needs. It's always been that way. It's that way again this year. We've been lucky to have guys step up. It's fun to see who emerges here in the next couple weeks.

**Q. Do you think there will be any significant position changes?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't foresee any right now. We only talked about one player on the

whole roster that might make a switch. I don't think we're going to do anything right now. I think we'll kind of go from there. I think we pretty much got everybody where they need to be, now it's just a matter of trying to move forward.

**Q. Offensive line, you have some movable parts there. Is that kind of a work in progress?**

COACH FERENTZ: It is. Like we always do, we'll try to get our best five guys out there. Obviously James and Matt have the most experience. Matt has some position flexibility. He's worked a lot of tackle throughout the last couple years at practice. We'll probably keep Brandon Scherff outside. That's kind of our focus going in, get him outside, play one position. I think he played most of the time out there last year. We'll give him a lot of work out there.

Andrew Donnal had a really good month of December down in Arizona. Then Brett jumped in there. Van Sloten did a good job against Oklahoma. Those are the three top guys competing for the tackle spots.

It's kind of like Gettis and Zusevics a couple years ago. They stepped in there and did a great job. The guys I mentioned came in here a little further ahead than Markus and Adam. Those guys were both 225 when they showed up there, had to build their way up. I think these guys are further ahead physically than Adam and Markus were.

**Q. How is MacMillan coming along?**

COACH FERENTZ: So far so good. He had an awful year last year start to finish really. I don't think anything is more frustrating to a player than being hurt, being injured. He just had one of those years where nothing went right for him.

But he's had a good out-of-season. I think he's really encouraged right now. I think we saw two years ago he's really capable of being a good football player if he can stay healthy. He really practiced well in Arizona a year ago December, not last December. Worked at left tackle as a two. Did a good job there.

We'll keep our fingers crossed. He's an older, mature guy, knows our system. He probably knows it as well as I do, which isn't saying much right now. But he's a guy that can really help us. Keep our fingers crossed. But I think he's on the right path right now.

**Q. How would you assess your receivers right now?**

COACH FERENTZ: We're young there, too. Got Keenan, who got some great experience last year. He needs to take that next step. I alluded to earlier, everybody that has played has to play better if we're going to have a better football team. I don't care who it is, James Vandenberg, James Ferentz, Keenan. Those guys have to step it up.

He's capable. He did a lot of good things last year, so now it's a chance to build on what he got started. After that we're really young, or inexperienced. I shouldn't say young. We have guys like Steve Staggs, who is a senior. We have Kevonte, who did some good things last year, but played young. It's time for him to get going. He's ready. I think he works hard.

Like a lot of positions, we have to try to bring the best out of all the guys we have out there.

**Q. Expand on your statement of 'getting familiar with the offense'.**

COACH FERENTZ: It's been a process. It's been a lot of fun. I think it just worked this way this year because we ended up with a lot of change. I alluded to this last time we were together. Had we not had any changes staff-wise, I think we were at the point where every year we go back and review, but we need to take things apart and look a little closer. As an example, on offense, you start somewhere in 1999, you get six, seven years into it, you add something. Things kind of flow and make sense when you are starting something out. When you add something along the way, 10 years later you look at it, Why are we calling this and that? Just because.

It's given us a chance to examine everything we're doing on both sides of the football. I think we've kind of streamlined some things. Obviously with Greg coming in from the outside, we really had a meeting of the minds there. Greg has been a real delight to work with. He's a real professional. Just a tremendous person. Great expertise.

I think we're really comfortable with the path we're going down right now. But there's a lot of new nomenclature, terminology, and we're all learning right now. Even the old dogs are trying to learn some new tricks.

**Q. Was there a moment or time when something told you you needed some changes?**

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, I don't know if there's a defining moment at all. The bottom line is, we're 4-4, which I think you're well aware of. We're 4-4 the last two years. If that's the best you can do, there's nothing wrong with that. We've been here 13 years. There's not a year we haven't felt like we left something out there. It's the nature of coaching I think.

So the bottom line is we want to move forward. If 4-4 is the best we can be, that's fine. But we're shooting for something higher than that certainly, always have been. I think, again, the downside of continuity, stability I think is sometimes you just kind of stay on that same path.

It's time to look at a lot of things. That's what we're trying to do right now. It's fun. It's invigorating. We were going to do it regardless of what happened with our staff personnel-wise.

**Q. What type of role do you envision a guy like Brad Rogers having?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think that's one of the great things about Greg, when I was considering some people to take Ken's spot. Greg has demonstrated experience with a lot of different types of offenses. I think that speaks highly of a coach when they can do that. Some people have a playbook and they're married to it. That's great. If your players don't match that playbook, then that's a bad thing.

College football, especially if you're coaching at a school like Iowa, you're more apt to have things go back and forth a little bit. So to me it just made sense to get someone who has had experience. He's played with two backs, he's played with two tight ends, three-wide, four-wide, all that type of thing. I think his system will fit.

What we always try to do is figure out who our best players are, who can help us move the football and score points, then we'll try to come up with an attack that suits our personnel.

Brad is a guy who we think is a real quality football player. A little different than Nolan, because he made it to the field last year. I don't think we saw anything close to what Brad can be. That being said, I don't think we'll be a hundred percent two backs, we don't want to do that, but we want to utilize his talents.

**Q. James Vandenberg is a film freak self-described. Is he now watching film?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yes.

**Q. What is he watching?**

COACH FERENTZ: As you might imagine, we have a lot of cutups from where Greg has coached. A lot of our installation tape will be based on that. Really I've always felt even before it became more en vogue, but football players learn best from film, then doing things. To see the picture, see it being acted out, that's the best way to do it. We have some good pictures, good and bad, of what we're trying to do. That's the thing that players learn from.

**Q. You talk about fitting personnel with what you want to do. Defensively, I know you play two gap, I don't think that will change, but personnel on the defensive line being so young, maturity is a huge thing, do you think about changing something up there or do you stick with teaching these guys what you want them to be?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, Mitch is a good example and Matt Kroul. Fixated on that year in that department. In 2005, neither one of those guys had played prior to that. Matt Kroul right now, he's 305, 310. Doesn't look that big, but he is. Didn't look like that in '05. He played effectively against some good teams. He held his own. Not an issue. You think about a guy like Karl Klug who is 'undersized', maybe not big enough. I'm still reading articles out of Tennessee how they're trying to figure out the physics of the whole thing.

Leverage is a huge part of the game. Learning that is certainly something that is important. I would not disagree with the concept of experience and maturity being a big thing. But you can overcome that. You have to overcome it with athleticism and aggressiveness, attitude, those types of things. We can do some things coaching-wise to try to help.

If all you do is throw fast balls, you better be throwing it up near a hundred coming in. But if you can't throw it up that high, you better have a couple other things in your repertoire, at least one other good pitch. You get a guy off guard a little bit. I think that's what we'll have to do.

**Q. With the secondary, what do you envision with Nico Law?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think Lowery certainly has a beat on the corner position. Micah is a leading candidate. We have Greg Castillo. Pleased with Jordan Lomax. I think those are the four corners at the top. Tanner did a good job at free safety. We're expecting him to improve. He played, so he's got to be better.

The strong safety position right now to me is wide open. We may have Nico listed there. I told the players this morning, the depth charts, you can throw those out a week from now. It's nothing. It's just a starting point. You have Nico back there. Tommy Donatell, we'll probably work him more in the back end. Collin is a strong candidate. I think John Lowdermilk, we'll let them compete at the safety position, see who emerges.

**Q. What has Blythe done to put himself on the depth chart so early?**

COACH FERENTZ: He already has put himself in. He did some nice things last fall. He really had a good month of December, as well. Typically with younger guys, kind of up and down during the fall. It's not unusual. Austin went through that a little bit. I thought he kind of tailed off in November in practice. But he really did a nice job during the bowl prep. He's a strong, physical guy. Came in here as a pretty mature guy. You compare to him to a guy like James, 250, when he showed up, Austin was 285. He's got a big head start on a lot of guys we play with. He'll be in the mix.

We have six, seven, eight, maybe nine guys, maybe 10 for the offensive line positions. We're going into it with an open mind. There's no incumbents certainly. The best five guys will be the guys we'll fit in there, work from there.

**Q. Do you see yourself doing more spread next year?**

COACH FERENTZ: It's kind of funny. I was just reading somewhere, I guess we threw the ball last year more than we ever have. We didn't get any credit for it, I don't think. But maybe they were conservative throws we were throwing (laughter).

Anyway, yeah, going to do whatever it takes to score points and win. Bottom line, we're going to throw it. We're not going to turn it over. We got to be smart about what we're doing. It's not just all the quarterback. It's protection. It's guys doing the right things with routes, not tipping

the ball up in the air and making catches. We have to get better at making catches.

**Q. You haven't steered an offense towards a wide receiver till last year. What do you expect from James without Marvin?**

COACH FERENTZ: It will be different for him. But we have other guys that can catch the ball. That's the beauty of the thing. Last year Marvin was clearly our best receiver. He demonstrated that the last couple years. Really emerged and grew and did a good job. So we're hopeful other guys will take that same path and progression.

Marvin was a lot better player last year than he was in 2010. That's a challenge for Keenan. The other thing, too, I think it's well-documented, we didn't get the production out of the tight end position we normally would and have gotten historically. We can help ourselves a lot by getting a little bit more out of that position. We'll focus on that, too. I think we have a group that's capable of that.

**Q. Where is Rudock in terms of his maturation?**

COACH FERENTZ: He did a good job. Back last year, again towards the end of the year, we got to watch him more in December. Did some good things. Has a lot to learn. Had there been no changes. I guess the good news, Rudock has a lot less to forget than Vandenberg.

When we try to move forward, that's one advantage that Jake does have. He'll be in the thick of things. I think it's going to be tough for anybody to beat James out. If they can do it, great. But I think that will probably be tough. We'll get three other guys that will get reps with Jake, Cody and John. We'll see how that goes.

**Q. Is the thought still to red shirt Sokol?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think in a perfect world. If he's our second best quarterback, then he'll be our second best quarterback. We're playing to win.

**Q. Is it realistic to think maybe you come out of spring with a clear number one running back?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think that can happen. I don't think it will, but I think it could happen. I remind guys, too, last year at this time Canzeri, with all due respect, he probably sat on

the couch more than he did anything else. I'm sure he's doing more than that. But for our first-year players, their out-of-season is different most likely than what it was last year.

You look at guys like Jordan, Damon Bullock, they should be better players than they were last August. They've had a lot more football experience. Damon, I think we made it tough on him because we moved him around so much last year. We were trying to find the right niche for him. Clearly right now we're going to keep him at the running back spot, give him 15 days to work on it. De'Andre is a guy I think is totally capable of being a good player for us. He's got to step it up and go. He's capable certainly, too. We're going to let those three guys compete and see how that materializes.

**Q. How fixated are you on having a 200-carry number one guy?**

COACH FERENTZ: Not at all. We'll do whatever it takes. All three guys have versatility. Jordan is not the biggest guy in the world, but he's big enough. Damon and De'Andre are certainly bigger. But we're not fixed on a power back. We'll play with what we have, as long as they're effective.

**Q. These three set the bar, then the true freshman come in and try to get to that?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah. If they set the bar high, it's going to be tougher for the freshmen. We have an open mind to all those guys. That is a position where younger players can play. We'll do whatever we have to do to put the best guys out there in the fall. It's in the players' hands.

**Q. With Greg in the press box, which offensive coaches will on the field?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll actually do that. We never have. Ken has never been on the field. I have that written down a couple times during the spring. We'll work on that communication. Unless we get rained out, we'll be at Kinnick because of the construction. Makes it a little bit easier. It will be a little different certainly.

**Q. Has Phil Parker decided whether he'll be on the field or in the press box?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think so. We'll leave that to him.



**Q. It was maybe not quite 1999 when you kind of put it all together. Did it get stripped down on offense for you guys?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know about '99. But I think we're kind of to me program-wise a little bit like we were in 2000, 2001, 2008, somewhere in that ballpark where we're just trying to build back up. We have a really young team right now. I think it's going to be fun.

**Q. You started off commenting on the new construction. When that is finished, what will that building allow you to do?**

COACH FERENTZ: The bubble was great when it went up almost 30 years ago. Was it 30 years ago? 25, I guess. So it's really served its purpose, outlived its shelf life, for sure. It's allowed us to get done the things we need to get done. Spring ball, bowl prep is manageable.

It's going to be nice to have a permanent structure. We'll be able to practice more effectively, efficiently, safely. Those are all important things. The other part of the equation, facilities I think make everybody feel better, the people that are using them. I don't think they've ever been a reason to say you can't be successful. They do factor into recruiting. If you don't admit that, recognize that, then you're probably ignoring the facts. It is important in recruiting.

**Q. How close Shane DiBona to being full speed?**

COACH FERENTZ: Shane is fine. He entered back this January. He started out a little slower this January, he's recovered nicely, so he's doing well.

**Q. How is Dakota Getz?**

COACH FERENTZ: Dakota was a little different. Different injury. His is a little bit trickier coming back. He's on the right path. Still slowed a little bit at times but he's on the right path. He may be a little winded in the spring, but he'll be out there working. Dom and Carl should be full speed when June kicks in.

**Q. Was it a tough choice to keep James Morris at middle linebacker?**

COACH FERENTZ: I think he likes it there. We hopefully have some position flexibility there also, to keep coming on. We have some good competition there. Shane is a guy that has played for us not last year but two years ago as a true freshman. I think he certainly has potential.

Quinton Alston is a guy we were impressed with last year.

The one thing about James, I think he could play all three of the positions. Chris Kirksey could play two of them. With those two guys we have position flexibility and gives us a chance to get our best guys out there. It's just good that we have some conversation about competition at the linebacker spot. Collins played last year. Cole Fisher redshirted, but I think he's a good prospect.

I think we have more depth than we have in recent years. The other part should help our special teams, which I think with our lack of depth at linebacker and tight ends, that shows up a little bit at special teams. Hopefully we'll take a step forward there, too.

**Q. Has John Wienke embraced being a punter?**

COACH FERENTZ: He's working on it. He and Jonny Mullins. That's one position I left out that might be as important as any right now is the punting position. Eric did a great job certainly. John has been working hard on that. Obviously Jonny Mullins, as well. We have a freshman who is competing well. That's one that we probably won't know till August, who is going to be our punter. Can't take that for granted.

**Q. Any of the new rules ring a bell for you? I know the kickoff is moving up.**

COACH FERENTZ: The thing with helmets, I think the thinking behind that is it was just that typically players don't want to strap them on as tight as they need to be. It's not as comfortable. You see guys take them off like they're taking off a baseball cap. That probably means they're not on the way they need to be. I think it is an effort by the rules committee to really get them fitted properly, strap them up the way they should be.

Certainly in the next decade, that's going to be a major issue, just treatment of concussions. Comes right down from the top. So I think that part of the effort there is to rein that in a little bit. Go back to the '80s when we started wearing knee braces. Everybody complained about it. Now nobody says a word about it. I think that will all be good.

Probably the biggest rule change that's going to affect things is the kickoff. It's going to impact the game a little bit.

**Q. Kicker, wait and see?**

COACH FERENTZ: We'll let those guys compete. Meyer goes in number one. We expect Trent to compete with him. Then Marshall Koehn, who redshirted last year, is capable of getting in the mix, too. We'll take that probably right through the summer.

Mike comes in as the number one guy, but we'll let them compete. Trent has been the number one guy. We may fool around and let him play some receiver, too. He's been doing that, when guys go out and throw the ball.

**Q. Urban Meyer made quite a lot of noise. How do you think him going to Ohio State is going to impact the landscape of the Big Ten?**

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if I can answer that. He's had success everywhere he's been: Bowling Green, Utah, Florida. Obviously an excellent coach, recognized as such. He's done a great job everywhere he's been. I expect him to do the same thing there.

The one thing that won't change is, I'll predict this, Ohio State has had pretty good players. What is it, 22 years I've been in this league now, then six in the NFL watching the draft board, they've had pretty good players. What does that make it, 28 years I've been watching. I'll predict this: as long as I'm here, they'll have pretty good players. They've usually had pretty good coaches too. That's a common denominator. That's going to be a tough out for sure.

**Q. At what point did A.J. Derby decide to not play defense and transfer?**

COACH FERENTZ: You know, I'd be speculating. I think he's doing a good job at that position. Came as a surprise to me. That's the way those go sometimes. It's just a decision he made. I think his family supported that decision obviously. Zach remains on our team. He's a valued team member, done a really good job for us. Just a decision A.J. made. We support him on it. He'll do a good job.

**Q. Is he the only scholarship player that left?**

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, probably, as far as I know. I think so.

Thank you.