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An Interview With:

COACH KIRK FERENTZ

COACH FERENTZ: First of all on the medical front, I think Damon is doubtful, we'll see how the week pans out but I think that's doubtful at this point. And Greg Garmon, he's probably got a little better chance than Damon does. We'll see how the next couple days go before we make any judgments on that.

So I think we have to plan as if both guys are not going to be there. Otherwise, I think we are in pretty good shape health-wise and that's a positive.

Looking backwards, certainly happy about the win as I said on Saturday. It was a great crowd and the fans were great and turned out in gold. It was a great environment for the guys to play in, and we appreciate that. I thought the team's effort was good and it's certainly a positive.

So we turned our sights to Central Michigan yesterday, and you know, we're playing a team that's kind of unusual right now. They are coming off a bye week, can't remember many of those early in a season like this. But they have got a bye week in their third week.

They have had a week to rest a little bit and we have got two games to look at on them and last year's tape. I think if you look at them, they are a team that runs the ball really well.

We have a veteran group up front and their backs are doing a good job, big, strong guys. One guy is averaging about eight and a half yards a carry. The other guy is close to six; team-wise, right around six yards a carry, so they are doing a good job there. Good group of receivers. No. 84 has been their most productive guy, young, second-year player and doing a really nice job.

And their quarterback had a tough outing last time out, but you know, if you look at him

career-wise, he's a veteran guy. We would expect him to come back here and play well. I think last year he had 2,500 yards thrown in the conference and 19 touchdowns and he's had ten 300-yard plus games as a starter. So he's certainly a good quarterback that we have got a lot of respect for.

And then flipping it over defensively, it's going to be a different challenge for us because they are very different than any team that we've faced this year. They are aggressive, good players, and aggressive with their scheme. So it's a week where we have to be really right on point to have any success.

And you know, they have got a lot of good players, but their outside linebacker, safety-type player, No. 4, he's really a good football player. He's kind of their energizer and big-play guy, so we have to know where he is at all times. He's really a good football player.

That's kind of that. We have a lot to work on certainly in ourselves and we have a big week in front of us.

Q. With Damon Bullock, I know you said Saturday that he was walking around. What kind of procedure will he have to go through to be cleared to play?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know. I'm guessing you can probably go online and the protocol is pretty standard. It's out of our hands right now. The medical staff will tell us when they feel it's prudent for him to return to action. We'll just wait it out and see how things go. We are really optimistic and he has a great attitude. We are not going to put him on the field until it's more than safe.

Q. How encouraged were you by the way he was playing before the injury?

COACH FERENTZ: To me, I don't want to say bigger story but it is a bigger story in that he's a really young player, coming into the season. So

now in his third ballgame, he's playing very well. He was playing more decisively, more confident, and that's kind of representative of our football team.

It was encouraging until he got knocked out of the game. Hopefully, we'll get him back quickly and we can build on that, but that's encouraging. And it opened up an opportunity for other folks. Unfortunately Garmon's window was pretty short but we're happy with the way he stepped in there, too. Didn't look like he was overwhelmed or anything like that. It would have been nice to have him play a little bit more Saturday.

Q. Jordan Canzeri was out there running around. Is he progressing?

COACH FERENTZ: He's working back. We'll let him work more this week than he did last week. We'll just see how things go, he's moving along a lot faster than I would ever have guessed, I'll say that.

It's just those things are hard to predict and everybody is different. But he's full speed ahead. He's been cleared medically, though. It's just a matter of does he look good enough and is he confident to play. That's what a lot of injured players, all injured players have to go through, but at least he's moving forward and it's good to have him back in a uniform practicing.

Q. If you could, would he be a guy you would prefer to hold out?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't think we are going to have that luxury this year based on Saturday. I think whoever can help this team win is going to help and I just didn't even allow myself to think about it during the course of the summer just because I didn't think it was realistic. But I think he's been cleared now so it's a matter of when is he ready to play.

Q. When you look back on the film, is Weisman a guy who can be more than a band-aid?

COACH FERENTZ: We looked at him last week at that position with that in mind, and obviously he really contrasts. He's a contrast to the other guys that we have carrying the football.

So you know, would he be our go-to guy, our predominant back? I don't know. Only time will tell. But I think certainly he showed that he can do some things out there competitively and he brings a different tempo, if you will, running the

football, than everybody else. I think there's a place for everything in football, so just if it's in, it fits in. And we didn't have any choice Saturday, but yeah, you just never know until guys get on the game field and perform.

So you just never know what's going to happen and we are hardly out of the woods yet. That was one performance that was certainly encouraging.

Q. Is he a different back that keeps defense guessing when he's the lone back? Maybe he's not just in there to block?

COACH FERENTZ: He and Brad Rogers are different in that I think. Before I talk, we probably are going back to Jeremy Allen being the last exception to the rule. I think most of our fullbacks are frustrated middle linebackers.

So you know, I mean, those two guys are a little different, which is good, and we can get everybody healthy that might give us more flexibility.

Q. You had some struggles on offense before Weisman came in, and then he kind of ran through some tackles. Does that give the offense a boost or a shot in the arm?

COACH FERENTZ: I think we ran the ball fairly well the first week, and Damon was running the ball well Saturday, too. So there's all kinds of styles of backs.

But it does give us a contrast or, you know, another pitch in your repertoire, if you will. You think back, Stanford, Cleveland, we had Tommy Vardell who had played at Stanford, I saw him on TV playing at Stanford and he was on our team in Cleveland. And Gerhart a couple years ago and Shonn Greene was that kind of runner, too. Mark is not Shonn; I don't mean to suggest that. But as far as being a bit more of a physical-type guy, but there's room for everybody, and if it fits in the equation, that's good.

Q. I always think of Norm Granger when I think of good running backs. Is that a name or is there another name that comes to mind?

COACH FERENTZ: I said that in the post-game show with Gary and Ed, certainly Norm had as good ball skills as anybody I had. He wouldn't block anybody but he was really proficient running the ball and also screen passes. He was

really good.

I remember that Penn State game in '83, I believe it was, kind of a track meet game. He was a big part of that thing. And he would tell that you, too. I mean, believe me, he would tell you right off the bat how productive he was. But he was pretty good.

Q. He returned kicks, too.

COACH FERENTZ: That's a very unusual combination and that position has really changed through the years in my mind.

Some people have had that kind of fullback, too, but the last decade here, it's just been a glorified guard position really. Every now and then they catch a ball on the flat or drop a ball on the flat, had a few of those.

Q. How do you feel about the offensive line's growth from week one until this point?

COACH FERENTZ: I think they are progressing. You know, I think we grew a little bit on Saturday.

So that's encouraging. And there's still a lot of work to be done. It's like our team, we took steps forward but we still have a lot of work to do. I thought we did some things better and you could see some things that were going on in practice show up on Saturday, which is encouraging. Some guys are working on things that maybe they had not done well or proficiently and it showed up playing better on Saturday.

So that's encouraging when you see those things on film.

Q. Mike Malloy is still in the plans?

COACH FERENTZ: Absolutely. He would have played Saturday but I think it was the last week at this time he turned up sick. On Tuesday, I thought it was one of those 24 hours things. A guy can't come in during the course of the day. You don't want to get the rest of the team sick, and that's usually why they don't come in. It just went on and on. I think they were worried about appendicitis but it cleared up. He's fine and he'll be ready to go hopefully.

Q. He's a two, but if it came to a three, who would it be?

COACH FERENTZ: It would be Brad.

Q. Does Andre Dawson fit into the mix?

COACH FERENTZ: Probably not right now. He's practicing and doing a good job. It's

complicated. He's got a scholarship he received so if he plays he would forfeit his scholarship. It's a complicated deal, so we are limited on that one. Non-athletic scholarship, so it's a rule, NCAA rule.

Q. I'll look it up on the Internet.

COACH FERENTZ: (Laughter) That's what you do, right, go to the Internet.

Q. How's Connor Kornbrath's confidence?

COACH FERENTZ: One good, one bad. It looked like he was going to cry after the bad one. I was thinking about crying myself. In fact, the all-time worst punt was Tony Pruner. Fort Cherry is the home of Marty Schottenheimer and Marvin Lewis and it's where Tony Pruner actually kicked a punt for negative yardage into the wind.

It wasn't that bad. But the good news is the first one was really a good one, he got it up in the air, good coverage time, all that type of thing, and so -- but that second one -- but it's part of the ups and downs we are going to go with. We understood that coming in.

He's doing a really good job, works hard, has a great attitude. Again he didn't appear too rattled afterwards, so that was good.

Q. Is Hitchens one of those linebackers always looking to score the knock out? Does that affect his play a little bit?

COACH FERENTZ: I don't know if that's a fair characterization. He's doing a good job. But again, that's kind of our team right now. You have James Morris who is really seasoned -- and I feel funny saying that, to say it about a guy who has played two years plus two games, three games now. But James last spring, he and Mike Meyer, they just kind of elevated their level of confidence and that comes from playing, but also comes from really working hard and doing good things.

So he's kind of like on one tier and we need him there. Chris Kirksey is right behind him in that Chris has played and he's getting better with every week and then Hitch is still feeling his way around. His numbers have been good.

But he's third in the race only in that he's more inexperienced, so things are not happening quite as quick for him; whereas the other two guys will read things a little quicker. That's a race he's running but we have a lot of guys on our team like that right now, but he's doing a good job. He's got

a great attitude and he's a good young guy.

Q. Can you live with a misstep here and there if he can deliver a knockout punch?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's what hopefully linebackers will do. And he had a couple more plays I think he would like to have back, and closing that gap is what we are focused on right now.

So it's not that everybody doesn't have a couple plays they would like to have back but that's what we are trying to do is raise up that speed of reaction, and then if he delivers the knock-out punch at the end, too, we are all for those. That's a good thing.

Q. You're now a few months into the new practice facility. How concerned were you before the project that your program was falling behind in terms of facilities?

COACH FERENTZ: Oh, absolutely. I'm probably at fault there, because I tend to focus more on people than I do things. So I'll take the bullet on that one; probably should have been advocating for that longer, further back, because it does -- players are impressed by facilities. They are impressed by uniform changes.

If we wore a different uniform every week, I think that would probably enhance our image with some players. So things like that are things I'm not good at seeing. I need people to help me with that because I have a blind spot there.

But it's a first-class facility. And I actually don't mind going there. I hated going in the other place. I don't like being indoors necessarily if you don't have to. But yeah, we use it on a regular basis when we are in there on Sundays, and we go in there on Fridays. I don't mind going in there. It's really a beautiful building and it's got air and all that stuff in there. So it's air you can breathe, so it's really good.

Q. Why do you think kids like all the uniform changes?

COACH FERENTZ: If I understood, I would probably be younger. I just know they do. It's almost unanimous I think they do. That's the world we live in. It's not the same as when I was in the NFL. Why people bought all that stuff but they do and then pretty soon I figured out they were playing the games to sell the stuff. The games were secondary in some ways. It's an amazing thing.

Q. At this point in the season, how pleased are you with the development of the defensive line and how much credit should we give Reese Morgan?

COACH FERENTZ: That group was probably as young as any. You know, that and the receiver group, that's probably the youngest, least-experienced group at least. You think about two seniors that are playing right now, Joe and Steve and neither one of them really have a lot of starting experience, I think Steve started three games a year ago, Joe none.

So those guys are playing well. The whole group I think is really, they worked hard in the spring, saw the progress being made and we're hardly yet there, either. It's a little bit like hitch. They are playing hard and they practice hard.

Reese is an excellent fundamentalist and teacher. We have all seen that. We saw it at West High, which is really what attracted me to him in the first place, and made me realize I kind of flew it the first time around.

So we are making progress, and again, we have got a lot of young guys, Louis Trinca-Pasat, you don't hear much about him, he's been doing a lot of grunt work and working hard. It was his first start three weeks ago, and he's doing a lot of good things.

Cooper is a redshirt freshman and this is the first time he's ever played. He's not the biggest guy in the world but he's doing some good things in there. Carl Davis is improving, he's gaining some confidence. He's starting to feel his way around a little bit.

But it's kind of like our whole group; I think the whole team, there are a lot of things that, you know, will improve weekly and can get you excited because I know we can get a lot better, hopefully in a short amount of time, we'll have to. I think we made strides last week and now we have to keep going because we are not there yet, certainly.

Q. Receivers had a few opportunities last week. Do you guys consciously throw the back shoulder throw?

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, that's part of offensive football. Depending on how guys are playing, what their pattern or route is, that type of thing, so it's part of football, certainly.

Q. It seems to have evolved

COACH FERENTZ: Yeah, I don't know

enough about that stuff. But you know, we made some good plays on the ball the other day, which was good to see. That's encouraging, too.

Q. What was it about the bubble that wasn't pleasing. Were there practical issues, was it cosmetic?

COACH FERENTZ: That wasn't the driving force but I think we would all agree now that it's down, it wasn't the most aesthetically pleasing thing, and it's a lot prettier view out there now that it's not up there, and I have no idea what they did with it. We are probably in trouble with the environmentalists for bringing it down. I mean, what do you do with it? Unless they made it -- did they make it into an artificial turf field? Can they grind it up and make it?

But just, you know, if this wasn't college football, it probably would be okay. A lot of pro teams have those, because they serve a purpose. The biggest issue for me personally was, outside of the fact that you couldn't go in there in the summertime because it was about 30 degrees warmer in there, but just it was restrictive because of the contour of the building. So you couldn't film. To film, you had to put the lifts out on the field, so now you're restricting space. It wasn't big enough. Just it wasn't big enough for a college football team. There are pro football teams that have them and they are not recruiting, either. That's part of the deal there.

Q. With C.J., some people had him as the next Grankowski. Is he doing enough to help the offense right now?

COACH FERENTZ: My first comment on that is this. A lot of -- I've read a lot of articles, and people are quick to compare guys to guys. I think you probably know my preference is to let things unfold.

But it's easy to make comparisons. But I think, you know, players just need to -- allow them to have their careers and allow them to play, have their ups and downs, those types of things, because they happen. I think he's progressed and certainly he played well Saturday.

I think he played better and smarter Saturday than he did the week before that. Didn't leave his feet when he had the ball. Some things like that, but those are the things he's learning and if you tally up the amount of plays that he's had so far in his career, there are not that many.

So me personally, I think like you know, the speculation of him being drafted this year,

that's probably premature. Let's let him really have a great year this year, which I hope he does and I think he's on the right track. And then, you know, we'll see where we're at the end of the year. But it's -- you know, I guess there's nothing else to write about so people are writing about it.

But you know, we think he's got a chance to have a good play, a good career and he has not played much more than Bullock really, the reality is.

Yeah, we are certainly counting on him to play well and he's on the right path now. He's doing some good things now running- and pass-wise, so that's good.

Q. I know Coach Farley had mentioned, even against him, is he a guy who deserves that kind of attention?

COACH FERENTZ: When you have a guy who is 6-6, 6-7, he's a big guy. He's 260-plus and runs pretty well and he's a good athlete.

But you know, I don't mean that in a bad way, if you look at us right now, who would you defend if you're playing us, and that's what's what we are working on is to develop guys that you have to defend. And I think we are on the right path. I think some guys -- the more guys that are touching the ball; being involved is a good thing.

So I think if he's not one of the guys they have to defend, then we are going to be in trouble. So we really need him to be a feature guy.

But all of that being said, the ball goes where it has to go based on how they play us. But when we call him, we really need him. And he's done some good things, and I'm really optimistic he'll have a good year this year.

Q. Is the No. 3 receiver really up in the air right now?

COACH FERENTZ: It is. It was good to see Kevonte get involved, so that was good. Keenan had two really nice third down catches. That was good to see.

So, you know, you've got Shumpert, and Jordan jumped in there, had a nice third down catch. So we have got a help wanted sign up, no doubt about that. I said this last week; that group overall has practiced a lot better since the start of August. I was hopeful and confident, sort of confident, that that was going to show up last week. But moving forward, it has to or we're in trouble. I mean, somebody's got to play.

But that's college football, too. Nobody saw the Ramon Ochoa train coming in 2003, but thank goodness it did, or we were totally out of luck. And Michigan is still trying to figure out -- anybody that played in that game, is trying to figure out how the heck he scored or did what he did in that game. It defied physics. Those are the things that make college football fun.

Q. Are your freshmen pretty much out unless somebody gets hurt?

COACH FERENTZ: No, we are keeping an open mind. We are still moving a few things around. Malloy will play this week, unless he gets sick again, which maybe him thinking about playing will cause him to get sick between now and Saturday -- I hope not. I think we'll keep an open mind. We are looking for all the help we can get.

Q. Tom Donatell had some big plays this season, how did he win that position battle?

COACH FERENTZ: I think the first thing that comes to mind for me would be consistency. That's the first word I think of with him. He's worked extremely hard.

First of all he's the perfect Iowa safety. He's a walk-on that nobody knew about and all that kind of stuff, and he's been around here for five or six years, whatever it is, because he actually gray-shirted, he was hurt.

But he's worked hard. He did a nice job last year playing outside linebacker as well as safety, and he just shows up every day, works, and I think the plays that he has made is a result of him practicing and watching tape, just playing smart football. I'm not saying he's like a lot of the safeties that we've played but a lot of the safeties that we have had that have played well have had those attributes. It's a real credit to Tommy and really great to see him pick off a couple balls. We're all for that, that's for sure.

Q. Mike Meyer is one PAT away from tying Nate Kaeding's consecutive field goal record, can you comment on that?

COACH FERENTZ: We were just talking about that. Probably what it means is that somebody blocked one, or Nate might have missed one, which tells you really good players have bad things happen to them, too. But that did surprise me. I read that somewhere in the last 48 hours.

Mike is a guy, again, I would couple him with James Morris, a guy that has really elevated his performance and his best kicking is ahead of him, which is neat for us, just like James' best linebacking is ahead of him.

If you can even get remotely mentioned with Nate -- I'm not in the comparison game, but if you're in the same discussion, that's good. That's the kind of guy I'd like to be included with in that group, that's for sure.

Q. How much does it help having a quarterback that you have film on?

COACH FERENTZ: That part is a good thing certainly. They have only played two games, but I think we have an idea of what their personality is and who they are, so it's -- and part of that Coach Enos played at Michigan State, coached at Michigan State. Coach Watts is there with him who is an excellent coach and he was a long-time coach at Michigan State, as well.

So I think we have an idea of what they are going to do and I think they have a good idea what they are going to do, too. They have a good plan, a good identity, that type of thing. So at least we know and I think again, the last outing for the quarterback is probably a real, you know -- you can throw that one out. I think we'll see a guy who is really confident and I'm sure he's determined to come back and really play well.

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